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Galaxy

Science Fiction

ROGER ZELAZNY

THE HAND OF OBERON

Barry Malzberg **Raccoona Sheldon** **John Varley**

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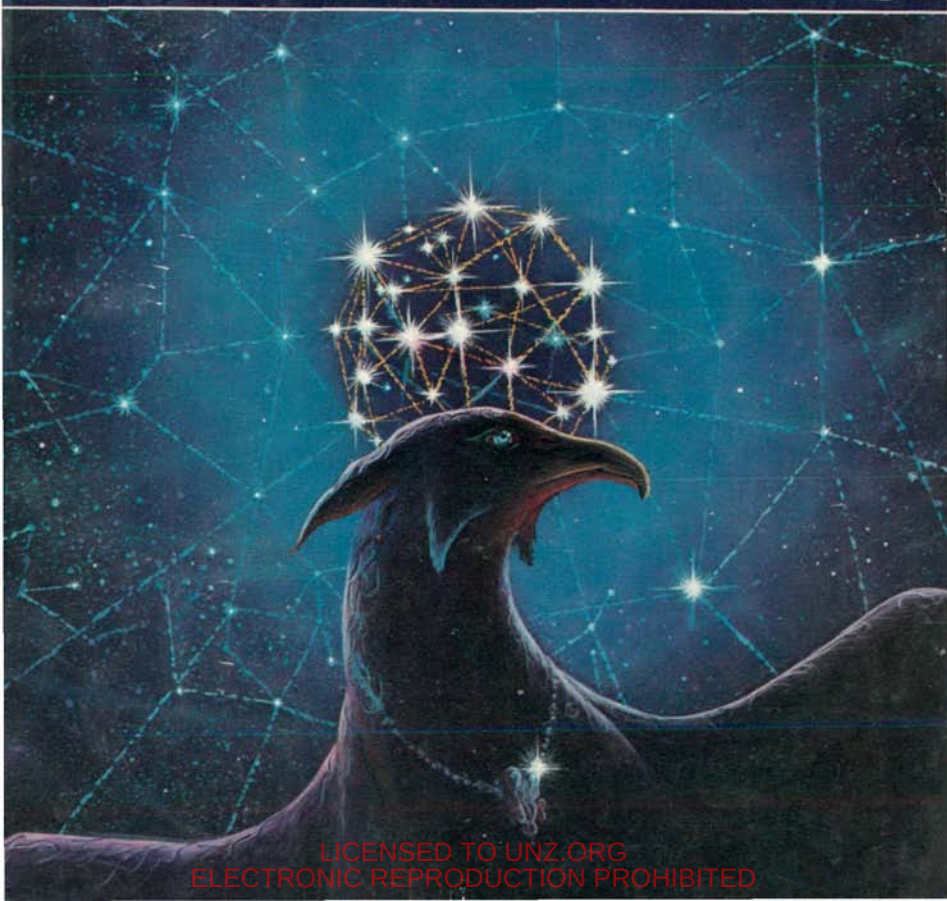

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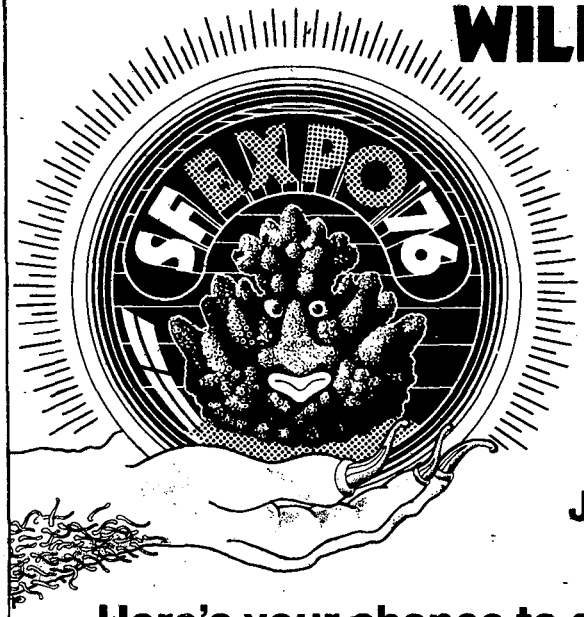

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SERIAL

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Cover by Sternbach, from
THE HAND OF OBERON

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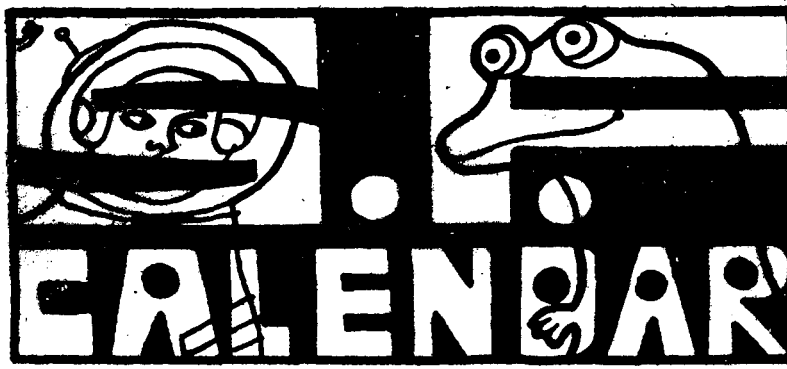

MAY 28-31. AUTOCLAVE, Howard Johnson's New Center Motor Lodge, Detroit, Mich. GsH: Gene Wolfe and Donn Brazier. Registration: $5 until May 1, $6 after, $7 at the door. For info: Autoclave, Box 04097, Detroit, MI. 48204

MAY 28-31. DISCLAVE 76, Sheraton Park Hotel, Washington, DC. GoH: Philip Klass (William Tenn). Registration $3 until May 20th, $5 after. For info: Alexis Gilliland, 4030 8th St. South, Arlington, VA 22204

JUNE 4-7. Stockholm Inst. of Tech. Student Union, Stockholm, Sweden. GoH: Jack Vance. Attending membership $10, $2.25 supporting. For info: Scandinavian SF Con, Box 3273, S-10365 Stockholm, Sweden.

JUNE 11-14. D-CON 76, Sheraton-Dallas Hotel, Dallas, Texas. GoH: Robert Silverberg. Attending membership $10, $3 supporting. For info: The Dallas Area Science Fantasy Society, 2515 Perkins Street, Forth Worth, TX.

JUNE 18-20. 1976 Annual Conference of the SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana. For info: Michael McClintock, Dept. of English, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

JUNE 25-29. SF EXPO 76, New York Hilton, N.Y., N.Y. Toastmaster: Isaac Asimov. Attending membership $18.50, $10 supporting. For info: Science Fiction Services, 2 Church Street, Montclair, NJ.

JULY 2-5. WESTERCON 29, International Hotel, Los Angeles, CA. GoH: H.L. Gold, fan GoH Gregg Calkins. Attending membership $5 until June, $6 after, $3 supporting. For info: Westercon 29, Box 5384, Mission Hills, CA 91345

AUGUST 27-29. BUBONICON 7, Ramada Inn, Albuquerque, NM. GoH: Bill Rotsler. Membership $4 until July 31st, $5 after. For info: Roy Tackett, 915 Green Valley Road NW, Albuquerque, NM.

SEPT. 2-6. MIDAMERICON, Hotel Muehlebach, Kansas City, MO. GoH: Robert Heinlein, fan GoH George Barr. Attending membership $20 until May 1st, $25 until Aug. 1st, $50 after, Supporting membership $6. For info: P.O. Box 221, Kansas City, MO 64141

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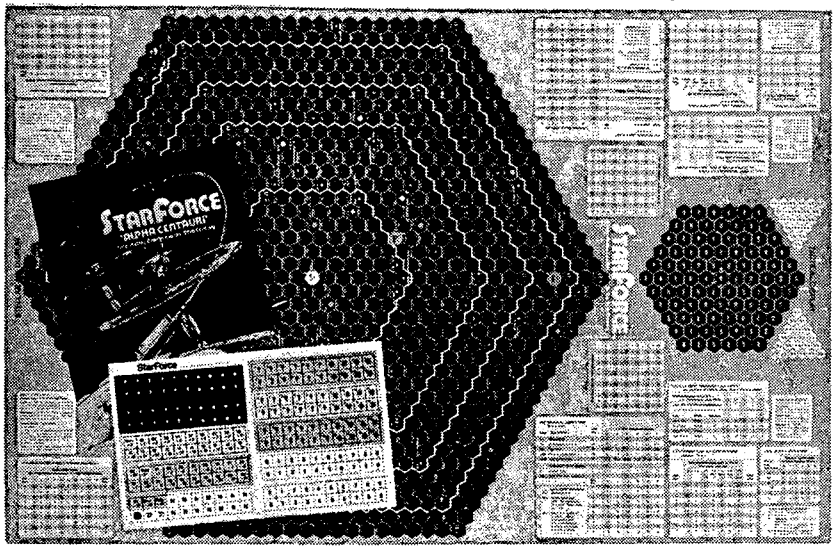

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The Hand

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# of OBERON

Roger Zelazny

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I.

A BRIGHT FLASH of insight, to match that peculiar sun . . .

There it was . . . Displayed within that light, a thing I had only seen self-illuminated in darkness up until then: the Pattern, the great Pattern of Amber cast upon an oval shelf beneath/above a strange sky-sea.

. . . . And I knew, perhaps by that within me which bound us, that this had to be the real one. Which meant that the Pattern in Amber was but its first shadow. Which meant—

Which meant that Amber itself was but a shadow, albeit a special one, for the Pattern was not carried over into places beyond the realm of Amber, Rebma and Tir-na Nog'th. Meaning, then, that this place to which we had come was, by the law of precedence and configuration, the real Amber.

I turned to a smiling Ganelon, his beard and wild hair molten in the merciless light.

"How did you know?" I asked him.

"You know I am a very good guesser, Corwin," he replied, "and I recall everything you ever told me about how things work in Amber: how its shadow and those of your struggles are cast across the worlds. I often wondered, in thinking of the black road, whether anything could have cast such a shadow into Amber itself. And I imagined that such a something would have to be extremely basic, powerful and secret." He gestured at the scene before us. "Like that."

"Continue," I said.

His expression changed and he shrugged.

"So there had to be a layer of reality deeper than your Amber," he explained, "where the dirty work was done. Your patron beast led us to what seems to be such a place, and that blot on the Pattern looks to be the dirty work. You agreed."

I nodded.

"It was your perceptiveness rather than the conclusion itself which stunned me so," I said.

"You beat me to it," admitted Random, off to my right, "but the feeling has found its way into my intestines—to put it delicately. I do believe that somehow that is the basis of our world down there."

"An outsider can sometimes see things better than one who is part of them," Ganelon offered.

Random glanced at me and returned his attention to the spectacle.

"Do you think things will change anymore," he asked, "if we go down for a closer look?"

"Only one way to find out," I said.

"Single file, then," Random agreed. "I'll lead."

"All right."

Random guided his mount to the right, the left, the right, in a long series of switchblades which zigged us and zagged us across most of the face of the wall. Continuing in the order we had maintained all day, I followed him and Ganelon came last.

"Seems stable enough now," Random called back.

"So far," I said.

"Some sort of opening in the rocks below."

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I leaned forward. There was a cavemouth back to the right, on a level with the oval plain. Its situation was such that it had been hidden from sight when we had occupied our higher position.

"We pass fairly near it," I said.

"—quickly, cautiously and silently," Random added, drawing his blade.

I unsheathed Grayswandir, and one turn back above me Ganelon drew his own weapon.

We did not pass the opening, but turned leftward once more before we came to it. We moved within ten or fifteen feet of it, however, and I detected an unpleasant odor which I could not identify. The horses must have done a better job of it, though, or been pessimists by nature, because they flattened their ears, widened their nostrils and made alarmed noises while turning against the reins. They calmed, however, as soon as we had made the turn and begun moving away once again. They did not suffer a relapse until we reached the end of our descent and moved to approach the damaged Pattern. They refused to go near it.

Random dismounted. He advanced to the edge of the design, paused and stared. After a time, he spoke without looking back.

"It follows that the damage was deliberate," he said, "from everything else that we know."

"It seems to follow," I said.

"It is also obvious that we were brought here for a reason."

"I'd say so."

"Then it does not take too much imagination to conclude that our purpose for being here is to determine how the Pattern was damaged and what might be done to repair it."

"Possibly. What is your diagnosis?"

"Nothing yet."

He moved along the perimeter of the figure, off to the right where the smear-effect began. I resheathed my blade and prepared to dismount. Ganelon reached over and took hold of my shoulder.

"I can make it myself—" I began.

But, "Corwin," he said, ignoring my words, "there does appear to be a small irregularity out toward the middle of the Pattern. It does not look like something that belongs . . ."

"Where?"

He pointed and I followed the gesture.

There was some foreign object near to the center. A stick? A stone? A stray bit of paper. . . ? It was impossible to tell from this distance.

"I see it," I said.

We dismounted and headed toward Random, who by then was crouched at the extreme right of the figure, examining the discoloration.

"Ganelon's spotted something out toward the center," I said.

Random nodded.

"I've noticed it," he replied. "I was just trying to decide on the best way to head out for a better look. I do not relish the notion of walking a broken Pattern. On the other hand, I was wondering what I would be laying myself open to if I tried heading in across the blackened area. What do you think?"

"Walking what there is of the

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Pattern would take some time," I said, "If the resistance is on par with what it is at home. Also, we have been taught that it is death to stray from it—and this setup would force me to leave it when I reach the blot. On the other hand, as you say, I might be alerting our enemies by treading on the black. So—"

"So neither of you is going to do it," Ganelon interrupted. "I am."

Then, without waiting for a reply, he took a running leap into the black sector, raced along it toward the center, paused long enough to pick up some small object, turned and headed back.

Moments later, he stood before us.

"That was a risky thing to do," Random said.

He nodded.

"But you two would still be debating it if I hadn't." He raised his hand and extended it. "Now, what do you make of this?"

He was holding a dagger. Impaled on it was a rectangle of stained pasteboard. I took them from him.

"Looks like a Trump," Random said.

"Yes."

I worked the card loose, smoothed down the torn sections. The man I regarded upon it was half-familiar—meaning of course, that he was also half-strange. Light, straight hair, a trifle sharp-featured, a small smile, somewhat slight of build.

I shook my head.

"I do not know him," I said.

"Let me see."

Random took the card from me, frowned at it.

"No," he said after a time. "I don't either. It almost seems as though I should, but . . . No."

At that moment, the horses renewed their complaints much more forcefully. And we needed but turn partway to learn the cause of their discomfort, in that it had chosen that moment to emerge from the cave.

"Damn," said Random.

I agreed with him.

Ganelon cleared his throat, took forth his blade.

"Anyone know what it is?" he asked quietly.

My first impression of the beast was that it was snakelike, both from its movements and because of the fact that its long thick tail seemed more a continuation of its long thin body than a mere appendage. It moved on four double-jointed legs, however, large-footed and wickedly clawed. Its narrow head was beaked, and it swung from side to side as it advanced, showing us one pale blue eye and then the other. Large wings were folded against its sides, purple and leathery. It possessed neither hair nor feathers, though there were scaled areas across its breast, shoulders, back and along the length of its tail. From beak-bayonet to twisting tail-tip it seemed a little over three meters. There was a small tinkling sound as it moved, and I caught a flash of something shining brightly at its throat.

"Closest thing I know," said Random, "is a heraldic beast—the griffin. Only this one is bald and purple."

"Definitely not our national bird," I added, drawing Grays-

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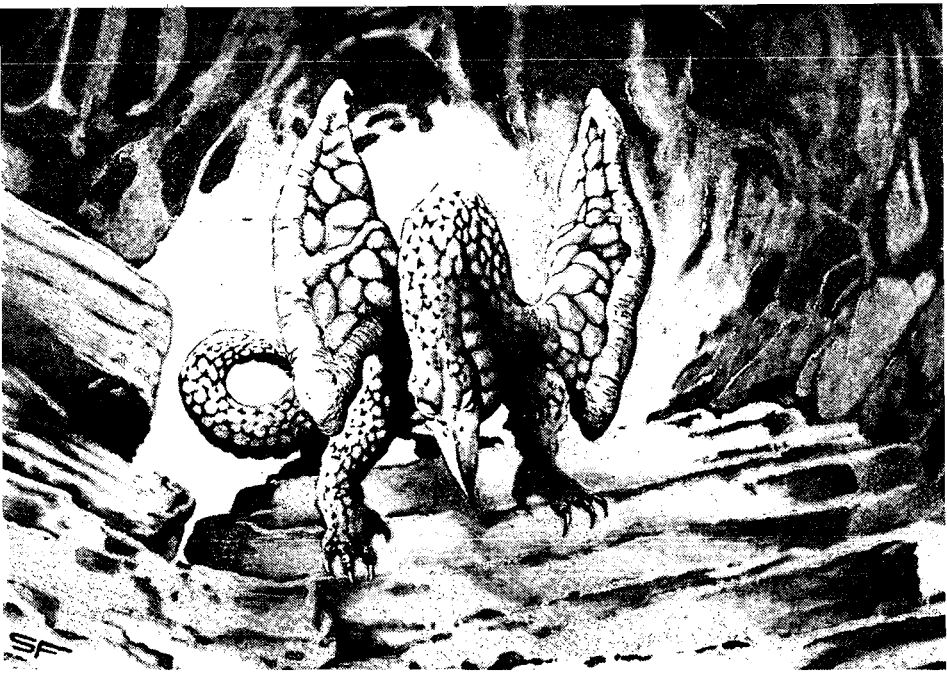

wandir and swinging its point into line with the creature's head.

The beast darted a red, forked tongue. It raised its wings a few inches, then let them fall. When its head swung to the right its tail moved to the left, then left and right, right and left—producing a near-hypnotic, flowing effect as it advanced.

It seemed more concerned with the horses than with us, however, for its course was directed well past us toward the spot where our mounts stood quivering and stamping. I moved to interpose myself.

At that point, it reared.

Its wings went up and out, spreading like a pair of slack sails suddenly caught by a gust of wind. It was back on its hind legs and towering above us, seeming to occupy at least four times the space it had previously. And then it shrieked, a godawful, hunting scream or challenge that left my ears ringing. With that, it snapped those wings downward and sprang, becoming temporarily airborne.

The horses bolted and ran. The beast was beyond our reach. It was only then that I realized what the bright flash and the tinkling had represented. The thing was tethered, by means of a long chain running back into the cave. The exact length of its leash was immediately a question of more than academic interest.

I turned as it passed, hissing, flapping and falling, beyond us. It had not possessed sufficient momentum to obtain true flight in that brief rush upward. I saw that Star and Firedrake were retreating

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toward the far end of the oval. Random's mount Iago, on the other hand, had bolted in the direction of the Pattern.

The beast touched ground again, turned as if to pursue Iago, appeared to study us once more and froze. It was much nearer this time—under four meters—and it cocked its head, showing us its right eye, then opened its beak and made a soft cawing noise.

"What say we rush it now?" said Random.

"No. Wait. There is something peculiar about its behavior."

It had dropped its head while I was speaking, spreading its wings downward. It struck the ground three times with its beak and looked up again. Then it drew its wings partway back toward its body. Its tail twitched once, then swung more vigorously from side to side. It opened its beak and repeated the cawing sound.

At that moment we were distracted.

Iago had entered the Pattern, well to the side of the darkened area. Five or six meters into it, standing obliquely across the lines of power, he was caught near one of the Veil points like an insect on a piece of flypaper. He cried loudly as the sparks came up about him and his mane rose and stood erect.

Immediately, the sky began to darken directly overhead. But it was no cloud of water vapor which had begun to coalesce. Rather, it was a perfectly circular formation which had appeared, red at the center, yellow nearer the edges, turning in a clockwise direction. A sound like a single bell chime followed by the growl of a bullroarer suddenly came to our ears.

Iago continued his struggles, first freeing his right front foot, then entangling it again as he freed the left, neighing wildly the while. The sparks were up to his shoulders by then, and he shook them like raindrops from his body and neck, his entire form taking on a soft, buttery glow.

The roaring increased in volume and small lightnings began to play at the heart of the red thing above us. A rattling noise caught my attention at that moment, and I glanced downward to discover that the purple griffin had slithered past and moved to interpose itself between us and the loud red phenomenon. It crouched like a gargoyle, facing away from us, watching the spectacle.

Just then, Iago freed both front feet and reared. There was something insubstantial about him by then, what with his brightness and the spark-shot indistinctness of his outline. He might have neighed at that moment, but all other sounds were submerged by the incessant roar from above.

A funnel descended from the noise formation—bright, flashing, wailing now, and tremendously fast. It touched the rearing horse, and for a moment his outline expanded enormously, becoming increasingly tenuous in direct porportion to this effect. And then he was gone. For a brief interval, the funnel remained stationary, like a perfectly balanced top. Then the sound began to diminish.

The trunk raised itself, slowly, to a point but a small distance—

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perhaps the height of a man—above the Pattern. Then it snapped upwards as quickly as it had descended.

The wailing ceased. The roaring began to subside. The miniature lightnings faded within the circle. The entire formation began to pale and slow. A moment later, it was but a bit of darkness; another moment and it was gone.

No trace of Iago remained anywhere that I could see.

"Don't ask me," I said when Random turned toward me. "I don't know either."

He nodded, then directed his attention toward our purple companion who was just then rattling his chain.

"What about Charlie here?" he asked, fingering his blade.

"I had the distinct impression he was trying to protect us," I said, taking a step forward. "Cover me. I want to try something."

"You sure you can move fast enough?" he asked. "With that side . . ."

"Don't worry," I said, a trifle more heartily than necessary, and I kept moving.

He was correct about my left side, where the healing knife wound still ached dully and seemed to exercise a drag on my movements. But Grayswandir was still in my right hand and this was one of those occasions when my trust in my instincts was running high. I had relied on this feeling in the past with good results. There are times when such gambles just seem to be in order.

Random moved ahead and to the right. I turned sidewise and extended my left hand as you would in introducing yourself to a strange dog, slowly. Our heraldic companion had risen from its crouch and was turning.

It faced us again and studied Ganelon, off to my left. Then it regarded my hand. It lowered its head and repeated the ground-striking movement, cawed very softly—a small, bubbling sound—raised its head and slowly extended it. It wagged its great tail, touched my fingers with its beak, then repeated the performance. Carefully, I placed my hand on its head. The wagging increased; its head remained motionless. I scratched it gently about the neck and it turned its head slowly then, as if enjoying it. I withdrew my hand and dropped back a pace.

"I think we're friends," I said softly. "Now you try it, Random."

"Are you kidding?"

"No, I'm sure you're safe. Try it."

"What will you do if you are wrong?"

"Apologize."

"Great."

He advanced and offered his hand. The beast remained friendly.

"All right," he said half a minute or so later, still stroking its neck, "what have we proved?"

"That he is a watchdog."

"What is he watching?"

"The Pattern, apparently."

"Offhand then," said Random, moving back, "I would say that his work leaves something to be desired." He gestured at the dark area. "Which is understandable, if he is this friendly to anyone who doesn't eat oats and whinny."

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"My guess is that he is quite selective. It is also possible that he was set here after the damage was done, to defend against further unappreciated activity."

"Who set him?"

"I'd like to know myself. Someone on our side, apparently."

"You can now test your theory further by letting Ganelon approach him."

Ganelon did not move.

"It may be you have a family smell about you," he finally said, "and he only favors Amberites. So I will pass, thank you."

"All right. It is not that important. Your guesses have been good so far. How do you interpret events?"

"Of the two factions out for the throne," he said, "that composed of Brand, Fiona and Bleys was, as you said, more aware of the nature of the forces that play about Amber. Brand did not supply you with particulars—unless you omitted some incidents he might have related—but my guess is that this damage to the Pattern represents the means by which their allies gained access to your realm. One or more of them did that damage, which provided the dark route. If the watchdog here responds to a family smell or some other identifying information you all possess, then he could actually have been here all along and not seen fit to move against the despoilers."

"Possibly," Random observed. "Any idea how it was accomplished?"

"Perhaps," he replied. "I will let you demonstrate it for me, if you are willing."

"What does it involve?"

"Come this way," he said, turning and heading over to the edge of the Pattern.

I followed him. Random did the same. The watchgriffin slunk at my side.

Ganelon turned and extended his hand.

"Corwin, may I trouble you for that dagger I fetched us?"

"Here," I said, drawing it from my belt and passing it over.

"I repeat, what does it involve?" Random inquired.

"The blood of Amber," Ganelon replied.

"I am not so sure I like this idea," Random said.

"All you have to do is prick your finger with it," he said, extending the blade, "and let a drop fall upon the Pattern."

"What will happen?"

"Let's try it and see."

Random looked at me.

"What do you say?" he asked.

"Go ahead. Let's find out. I'm intrigued."

He nodded.

"Okay."

He received the blade from Ganelon and nicked the tip of his left little finger. He squeezed the finger then, holding it above the Pattern. A tiny red bead appeared, grew larger, quivered, fell.

Immediately, a wisp of smoke rose from the spot where it struck, accompanied by a tiny crackling noise.

"I'll be damned!" said Random, apparently fascinated.

A tiny stain had come into being, gradually spreading to about the size of a half dollar.

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"There you are," said Ganelon. "That is how it was done."

The stain was indeed a miniature counterpart of the massive blot further to our right. The watchgriffin gave forth a small shriek and drew back, rapidly turning his head from one of us to the other.

"Easy, fellow. Easy," I said, reaching out and calming him once more.

"But what could have caused such a large—" Random began, and then he nodded slowly.

"What indeed?" said Ganelon. "I see no mark to show where your horse was destroyed."

"The blood of Amber," Random said. "You are just full of insights today, aren't you?"

"Ask Corwin to tell you of Lorraine, the place where I dwelled for so long," he said, "the place where the dark circle grew. I am alert to the effects of those powers, though I knew them then only at a distance. These matters have become clearer to me with each new thing I have learned from you. Yes, I have insights now that I know more of these workings. Ask Corwin of the mind of his general."

"Corwin," Random said, "give me the pierced Trump."

I withdrew it from my pocket and smoothed it. The stains seemed more ominous now. Another thing also struck me. I did not believe that it had been executed by Dworkin, sage, mage, artist and one-time mentor to the children of Oberon. It had not occurred to me until that moment that anyone else might be capable of producing one. While the style of this one did seem somehow familiar, it was not his work. Where had I seen that deliberate line before, less spontaneous than the master's, as though every movement had been totally intellectualized before the pen touched the paper? And there was something else wrong with it—a quality of idealization of a different order from that of our own Trumps, almost as if the artist had been working with old memories, glimpses or descriptions rather than a living subject.

"The Trump, Corwin. If you please," Random said.

There was that about the way in which he said it to make me hesitate. It gave rise to the feeling that he was somehow a jump ahead of me on something important, a feeling which I did not like at all.

"I've petted old ugly here for you, and I've just bled for the cause, Corwin. Now let's have it."

I handed it over, my uneasiness increasing as he held it in his hand and furrowed his brow. Why was I suddenly the stupid one? Does a night in Tir-na Nog'th slow cerebration? Why—

Random began to curse, a string of profanities unsurpassed by anything encountered in my long military career.

Then, "What is it?" I said. "I don't understand."

"The blood of Amber," he finally said. "Whoever did it walked the Pattern first, you see. Then they stood there at the center and contacted him via this Trump. When he responded and a firm contact was achieved, they stabbed him. His blood flowed upon the Pattern, obliterating that part of it, as mine did here."

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He was silent for the space of several deep breaths.

"It smacks of a ritual," I said.

"Damn rituals!" he said. "Damn all of them! One of them is going to die, Corwin. I am going to kill him—or her."

"I still do not—"

"I am a fool," he said, "for not seeing it right away. Look! Look closely!"

He thrust the pierced Trump at me. I stared. I still did not see.

"Now look at me!" he said. "See me!"

I did. Then I looked back at the card.

I realized what he meant.

"I was never anything to him but a whisper of life in the darkness. But they used my son for this," he said. "That has to be a picture of Martin."

II.

STANDING THERE, beside the broken Pattern, regarding a picture of the man who may or may not have been Random's son, who may or may not have died of a knife wound received from a point within the Pattern, I turned and took a giant step back within my mind for an instant replay of the events which had brought me to this point of peculiar revelation. I had learned so many new things recently that the occurrences of the past few years seemed almost to constitute a different story than they had while I was living them. Now this new possibility and a number of things it implied had just shifted the perspective again.

I had not even been aware of my name when I had awakened in Greenwood, that private hospital in upstate New York where I had spent two totally blank weeks subsequent to my accident. It was only recently that I had been told that the accident itself had been engineered by my brother Bleys, immediately following my escape from the Porter Sanitarium in Albany. I got this story from my brother Brand, who had railroaded me into Porter in the first place, by means of fake psychiatric evidence. At Porter, I had been subjected to electroshock therapy over the span of several days, results ambiguous but presumably involving the return of a few memories. This was apparently what had scared Bleys into making the attempt on my life at the time of my escape, shooting out a couple of my tires on a curve above a lake. This doubtless would have resulted in my death, had Brand not been a step behind Bleys and out to protect his insurance investment, me. He said he had gotten word to the cops, dragged me out of the lake and administered first aid until help arrived. Shortly after that, he was captured by his former partners—Bleys and our sister Fiona—who confined him in a guarded tower in a distant place in Shadow.

There had been two cabals, plotting and counterplotting after the throne, treading on one another's heels, breathing down one another's necks and doing anything else to one another that might suggest itself at that range. Our brother Eric, backed by brothers Julian and Caine, had been preparing to take

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the throne, left long vacant by the unexplained absence of our father, Oberon. Unexplained to Eric, Julian and Caine, that is. To the other group, consisting of Bleys, Fiona and—formerly—Brand, it was not unexplained because they were responsible for it. They had arranged for this state of affairs to come into being in order to open the way for Bleys' accession to the throne. But Brand had committed a tactical error in attempting to obtain Caine's assistance in their play for the throne, in that Caine decided a better deal obtained in upholding Eric's part. This left Brand under close scrutiny, but did not immediately result in the betrayal of his partners' identities. At about that time, Bleys and Fiona decided to employ their secret allies against Eric. Brand had demurred in this, fearing the strength of those forces, and as a result had been rejected by Bleys and Fiona. With everyone on his back then, he had sought to upset the balance of powers completely by journeying to the shadow Earth where Eric had left me to die centuries before. It was only later that Eric had learned that I had not died but was possessed of total amnesia, which was almost as good, had set sister Flora to watch over my exile and hoped that that was the last of it. Brand later told me he had gotten me committed to Porter in a desperate move to restore my memory as a preliminary to my return to Amber.

While Fiona and Bleys had been dealing with Brand, Eric had been in touch with Flora. She had arranged for my transfer to Greenwood from the clinic to which the police had taken me, with instructions to keep me narcotized, while Eric began arrangements for his coronation in Amber. Shortly thereafter, our brother Random's idyllic existence in Texorami was broken when Brand managed to send him a message outside the normal family channels—*i.e.*, the Trumps—requesting deliverance. While Random, who was blissfully non-partisan in the power struggle, was about this business, I managed to deliver myself from Greenwood, still relatively unmemoried. Having obtained Flora's address from Greenwood's frightened director, I betook myself to her place in Westchester, engaged in some elaborate bluffing and moved in as a house guest. Random, in the meantime, had been less than successful in his attempt to rescue Brand. Slaying the snakey warden of the tower, he had had to flee its inner guards, utilizing one of the region's strangely mobile rocks. The guards, a hardy band of not quite human guys, had succeeded in pursuing him through Shadow, however, a feat normally impossible for most non-Amberites. Random had fled then to the shadow Earth where I was guiding Flora along the paths of misunderstanding while attempting to locate the proper route to enlightenment as to my own circumstances. Crossing the continent in response to my assurance that he would be under my protection, Random had come believing that his pursuers were my own creatures. When I helped him destroy them he was puzzled but unwilling to raise the issue while believing that I was engaged in

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some major maneuver thronewards. In fact, he had easily been tricked into conveying me back to Amber through Shadow.

This venture had proved beneficial in some respects while much less satisfactory in others. When I had finally revealed the true state of my personal situation, Random and our sister Deirdre, whom we had encountered along the way, conducted me to Amber's mirror-city within the sea, Rebma. There I had walked the image of the Pattern and recovered the bulk of my memories as a result—thereby also settling the issue as to whether I was the real Corwin or merely one of his shadows. From Rebma I had traveled into Amber, utilizing the power of the Pattern to effect an instantaneous journey home. After fighting an inconclusive duel with Eric, I had fled via the Trumps into the keeping of my beloved brother and would-be assassin, Bleys.

I joined with Bleys in an attack on Amber, a mismanaged affair which we had lost. Bleys vanished during the final engagement, under circumstances which looked likely to prove fatal but, the more that I learned and thought about it, probably had not. This left me to become Eric's prisoner and an unwilling party to his coronation, after which he had had me blinded and locked away. A few years in the dungeons of Amber had seen a regeneration of my eyes, in direct proportion to the deterioration of my state of mind. It was only the accidental appearance of Dad's old adviser Dworkin, worse off mentally than myself, which had led to a way of escape.

After that, I set about recovering and I resolved to be more prudent the next time I went after Eric. I journeyed through Shadow toward an old land where I had once reigned—Avalon—with plans to obtain there a substance of which I alone among Amberites was aware, a chemical unique in its ability to undergo detonation in Amber. En route, I had passed through the land of Lorraine, there encountering my old exiled Avalonian general Ganelon, or someone very much like him. I remained because of a wounded knight, a girl and a local menace peculiarly similar to a thing occurring in the vicinity of Amber herself—a growing black circle somehow related to the black road our enemies traveled, a thing for which I held myself partly responsible because of a curse I had pronounced at the time of my blinding. I won the battle, lost the girl and traveled on to Avalon with Ganelon.

The Avalon we reached, we quickly learned, was under the protection of my brother Benedict, who had been having troubles of his own with a situation possibly akin to the black circle/black road menaces. Benedict had lost his right arm in the final engagement, but had been victorious in his battle with the hellmaids. He had warned me to keep my intentions toward Amber and Eric pure, and had then allowed us the hospitality of his manor while he remained for a few days more in the field. It was at his place that I met Dara.

Dara told me she was Benedict's great-granddaughter, whose existence had been kept secret from

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Amber. She drew me out as far as she could on Amber, the Pattern, the Trumps and our ability to walk in Shadow. She was also an extremely skilled fencer. We indulged in a bit of casual love-making on my return from a hellride to a place where I obtained a sufficient quantity of rough diamonds to pay for the things I was going to need for my assault on Amber. The following day, Ganelon and I picked up our supply of the necessary chemicals and departed for the shadow Earth where I had spent my exile, there to obtain automatic weapons and ammunition manufactured to my specifications.

En route, we had some difficulties along the black road, which seemed to have extended its scope of influence among the worlds of Shadow. We were equal to the troubles it presented, but I almost perished in a duel with Benedict, who had pursued us through a wild hellride. Too angry for argument, he had fought me through a small wood—still a better man than I, even wielding his blade left-handed. I had only managed to best him by means of a trick involving a property of the black road of which he was unaware. I had been convinced that he wanted my blood because of the affair with Dara. But no. In the few words that passed between us he denied any knowledge of the existence of such a person. Instead, he had come after us convinced that I had murdered his servants.

Now, Ganelon had indeed located some fresh corpses in the wood at Benedict's place, but we had agreed to forget about them, having no idea as to their identities and no de-

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sire to complicate our existence any further.

Leaving Benedict in the care of brother Gérard, whom I had summoned via his Trump from Amber, Ganelon and I proceeded to the shadow Earth, armed ourselves, recruited a strike force in Shadow and headed off to attack Amber. But upon our arrival we discovered that Amber was already under attack by creatures which had come in along the black road. My new weapons quickly turned the tide in Amber's favor, and my brother Eric died in that battle, leaving me his problems, his ill will and the Jewel of Judgment—a weather-controlling weapon he had used against me when Bleys and I had attacked Amber.

At that point, Dara showed up, swept on by us, rode into Amber, found her way to the Pattern and proceeded to walk it—prima facie evidence that we were indeed somehow related. During the course of this ordeal, however, she had exhibited what appeared to be peculiar physical transformations. Upon completion of the Pattern, she announced that Amber would be destroyed. Then she had vanished.

About a week later, brother Caine was murdered, under conditions arranged to show me as the culprit. The fact that I had slain his slayer was hardly satisfactory evidence of my innocence, in that the guy was necessarily in no condition to talk about it. Realizing, however, that I had seen his like before, in the persons of those creatures who had pursued Random into Flora's home, I finally found time to sit down with Random and hear the story of his unsuccessful attempt to rescue Brand from his tower.

Random, subsequent to my leaving him in Rebma years before, when I had journeyed to Amber to fight my duel with Eric, had been forced by Rebma's queen, Moire, to marry a woman of her court: Vialle, a lovely blind girl. This was partly intended as a punishment for Random, who years before had left Moire's late daughter Morganthe pregnant with Martin, the apparent subject of the damaged Trump Random now held in his hands. Strangely, for Random, he appeared to have fallen in love with Vialle, and he now resided with her in Amber.

After I left Random, I fetched the Jewel of Judgment and took it down to the chamber of the Pattern. There, I followed the partial instructions I had received for purposes of attuning it to my use. I underwent some unusual sensations during the process and was successful in obtaining control of its most obvious function: the ability to direct meteorological phenomena. After that, I questioned Flora concerning my exile. Her story seemed reasonable and jibed with those facts I did possess, although I had the feeling she was holding back somewhat on events at the time of my accident. She did promise to identify Caine's slayer as one of the same sort as those individuals Random and I had fought at her home in Westchester, however, and she assured me of her support in anything I might currently be about.

At the time I had heard Random's story, I was still unaware of

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the two factions and their machinations. I decided then that if Brand were still living, his rescue was of first importance, if for no other reason than the fact that he obviously possessed information that someone did not want circulated. I hit on a scheme for achieving this, the trial of which was only postponed for the time required by Gérard and myself for returning Caine's body to Amber. Part of this time, however, was appropriated by Gérard for purposes of beating me unconscious, just in case I had forgotten he was capable of the feat, to add weight to his words when he informed me that he would personally kill me should it turn out that I was the author of Amber's present woes. It was the most exclusive closed circuit fight I knew of, viewed by the family via Gérard's Trump—an act of insurance should I actually be the culprit and have a mind to erase his name from the list of the living because of his threat. We journeyed on to the Grove of the Unicorn then and exhumed Caine. At that time, we actually caught a brief glimpse of the legendary unicorn of Amber.

That evening we met in the library of the palace in Amber—we being Random, Gérard, Benedict, Julian, Deirdre, Fiona, Flora, Llewella and myself. There, we tested my idea for finding Brand. It amounted to all nine of us simultaneously attempting to reach him via his Trump. And we succeeded.

We contacted him and were successful in transporting him back to Amber. In the midst of the excitement, however, with all of us crowded about as Gérard bore him through, someone planted a dagger in his side. Gérard immediately elected himself attending physician and cleared the room.

The rest of us moved to a downstairs sitting room, there to backbite and discuss events. During this time, Fiona advised me that the Jewel of Judgment might represent a hazard in situations of prolonged exposure, suggesting the possibility that it, rather than his wounds, might have been the cause of Eric's death. One of the first signs, she believed, was a distortion of one's time-sense—an apparent slowdown of temporal sequence, actually representing a speedup of physiological events. I resolved to be more cautious with it, in that she was more conversant with these matters than the rest of us, having once been an advanced pupil of Dworkin's.

And perhaps she was correct. Perhaps there was such an effect in operation later that evening when I returned to my own quarters. At least, it seemed as if the person who attempted to kill me was moving a trifle more slowly than I would have myself under similar circumstances. At that, the stroke was almost successful. The blade caught me in the side and the world went away.

Leaking life, I awoke in my old bed in my old home on the shadow Earth where I had dwelled for so long as Carl Corey. How I had been returned, I had no idea. I crawled outside and into a blizzard. Clinging precariously to consciousness, I cached the Jewel of Judgment in my old compost heap, for the world did indeed seem to be slowing down

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about me. Then I made it to the road, to try flagging down a passing motorist.

It was a friend and former neighbor, Bill Roth, who found me there and drove me to the nearest clinic. There, I was treated by the same doctor who had attended me years before, at the time of my accident. He suspected I might be a psychiatric case, as the old record did reflect that faked state of affairs.

Bill showed up later, however, and set a number of things right. An attorney, he had grown curious at the time of my disappearance and done some investigating. He had learned about my fake certification and my successive escapes. He even possessed details on these matters and on the accident itself. He still felt there was something strange about me, but it did not really bother him that much.

Later, Random contacted me via my Trump and advised me that Brand had come around and was asking for me. With Random's assistance, I returned to Amber. I went to see Brand. It was then that I learned of the nature of the power struggle which had been going on about me, and the identities of the participants. His story, together with what Bill had told me back on the shadow Earth, finally brought some sense and coherence to occurrences of the past several years. He also told me more concerning the nature of the danger we currently faced.

I did nothing the following day, ostensibly for purposes of preparing myself for a visit to Tir-na Nog'th, actually to buy additional time in which to recover from my injury. This commitment made, however, it had to be kept. I did journey to the city in the sky that night, encountering a confusing collection of signs and portents, signifying perhaps nothing, and collecting a peculiar mechanical arm from the ghost of my brother Benedict while I was about it.

Returned from this excursion on high, I breakfasted with Random and Ganelon before setting out across Kolvir to return home. Slowly, bewilderingly, the trail began to change about us. It was as though we were walking in Shadow, a well-nigh impossible feat this near to Amber. When we reached this conclusion, we tried to alter our course, but neither Random nor I were able to affect the changing scene. About that time, the unicorn put in an appearance. It seemed to want us to follow it. We did.

It had led us through a kaleidescopic series of changes, until finally we arrived at this place, where it abandoned us to our present devices. Now, with this entire sequence of events tumbling through my head, my mind moved about the peripheries, pushed its way forward, returned to the words Random had just spoken. I felt that I was slightly ahead of him once more. For how long this state of affairs might last, I did not know, but I realized where I had seen work by the same hand which had executed the pierced Trump.

Brand had often painted when he was entering one of his melancholy periods, and his favorite techniques came to mind as I recalled canvas

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after canvas he had brightened or darkened. Add to this his campaign of years before to obtain recollections and descriptions from everyone who had known Martin. While Random had not recognized his style, I wondered how long it might be before he began thinking as I just had concerning the possible ends of Brand's information gathering. Even if his hand had not actually propelled the blade, Brand was party to the act by providing the means. I knew Random well enough to know that he meant what he had said. He would try to kill Brand as soon as he saw the connection. This was going to be more than awkward.

It had nothing to do with the fact that Brand had probably saved my life. I figured I had squared accounts with him by getting him out of that damned tower. No. It was neither indebtedness nor sentiment that caused me to cast about for ways to mislead Random or slow him down. It was the naked, frigid fact that I needed Brand. He had seen to that. My reason for saving him was no more altruistic than his had been in dragging me out of the lake. He possessed something I needed now: information. He had realized this immediately and he was rationing it—his life's union dues.

"I do see the resemblance," I said to Random, "and you may well be right about what happened."

"Of course I am right."

"It is the card that was pierced," I said.

"Obviously. I don't—"

"He was not brought through on the Trump, then. The person who did it therefore made contact, but was unable to persuade him to come across."

"So? The contact had progressed to a point of sufficient solidity and proximity that he was able to stab him anyway. He was probably even able to achieve a mental lock and hold him where he was while he bled. The kid probably hadn't had much experience with the Trumps."

"Maybe yes, maybe no," I said. "Llewella or Moire might be able to tell us how much he knew about the Trumps. But what I was getting at was the possibility that contact could have been broken before death. If he inherited your regenerative abilities he might have survived."

"Might have? I don't want guesses! I want answers!"

I commenced a balancing act within my mind. I believed I knew something that he did not, but then my source was not the best. Also, I wanted to keep quiet about the possibility because I had not had a chance to discuss it with Benedict. On the other hand, Martin was Random's son, and I did want to direct his attention away from Brand.

"Random, I may have something," I said.

"What?"

"Right after Brand was stabbed," I said, "when we were talking together in the sitting room, do you remember when the conversation turned to the subject of Martin?"

"Yes. Nothing new came up."

"I had something I might have added at that time, but I restrained myself because everyone was there.

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Also, because I wanted to pursue it in private with the party concerned."

"Who?"

"Benedict."

"Benedict? What has he to do with Martin?"

"I do not know. That is why I wanted to keep it quiet until I found out. And my source of information was a touchy one, at that."

"Go ahead."

"Dara. Benedict gets mad as hell whenever I mention her name, but so far a number of things she told me have proved correct—things like the journey of Julian and Gérard along the black road, their injury, their stay in Avalon. Benedict admitted these things had happened."

"What did she say about Martin?"

Indeed. How to phrase it without giving away the show on Brand. . . ? Dara had said that Brand had visited Benedict a number of times in Avalon, over a span of years. The time differential between Amber and Avalon is such that it seemed likely, now that I thought about it, that the visits fell into the period when Brand was so actively seeking information on Martin. I had wondered what kept drawing him back there, since he and Benedict had never been especially chummy.

"Only that Benedict had had a visitor named Martin, whom she thought was from Amber," I lied.

"When?"

"Some while back. I'm not sure."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"It is not really very much—and besides, you had never seemed especially interested in Martin."

He shifted his gaze to the griffin, crouched and gurgling on my right, then nodded.

"I am now," he said. "Things change. If he is still alive, I would like to get to know him. If he is not . . ."

"Okay," I said. "The best way to be about either one is to start figuring a way to get home. I believe we have seen what we were supposed to see and I would like to clear out."

"I was thinking about that," he said, "and it occurred to me that we could probably use this Pattern for that purpose. Just head out to the center and transfer back."

"Going in along the dark area?" I asked.

"Why not? Ganelon has already tried it and he's okay."

"A moment," said Ganelon. "I did not say that it was easy, and I am positive you could not get the horses to go that route."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Do you remember that place where we crossed the black road—back when we were fleeing Avalon?"

"Of course."

"Well, the sensations I experienced in retrieving the card and the dagger were not unlike the upset that came over us at that time. It is one of the reasons I was running so fast. I would favor trying the Trumps again first, under the theory that this point is congruent with Amber."

I nodded.

"All right. We might as well try

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making it as easy as we can. Let's collect the horses first."

We did this, learning the length of the griffin's leash while we were about it. He was drawn up short about thirty meters from the cavemouth, and immediately set up a bleating complaint. This did not make the job of pacifying the horses any easier, but it did give rise to a peculiar notion which I decided to keep to myself.

Once we had things under control, Random located his Trumps and I brought out my own.

"Let's try for Benedict," he said.

"All right. Any time now."

I noticed immediately that the cards felt cold again, a good sign. I shuffled out Benedict's and began the preliminaries. Beside me, Random did the same.

Contact came almost at once.

"What is the occasion?" Benedict asked, his eyes moving over Random, Ganelon and the horses, then meeting with my own.

"Will you bring us through?" I said.

"Horses, too?"

"The works."

"Come ahead."

He extended his hand and I touched it. We all moved toward him. Moments later, we stood with him in a high, rocky place, a chill wind ruffling our garments, the sun of Amber past midday in a sky full of clouds. Benedict wore a stiff leather jacket and buckskin leggings. His shirt was a faded yellow. An orange cloak concealed the stump of his right arm. He tightened his long jaw and peered down at me.

"Interesting spot you hie from," he said. "I glimpsed something of the background."

I nodded.

"Interesting view from this height, also," I said, noting the spyglass at his belt at the same time that I realized we stood on the wide ledge of rock from which Eric had commanded battle on the day of his death and my return. I moved to regard the dark swath through Garnath, far below and stretching off to the horizon.

"Yes," he said. "The black road appears to have stabilized its boundaries at most points. At a few others though, it is still widening. It is almost as if it is nearing a final conformity with some—pattern. —Now tell me, from what point have you journeyed?"

"I spent last night in Tir-na Nog'th," I said, "and this morning we went astray in crossing Kolvir."

"Not an easy thing to do," he said. "Getting lost on your own mountain. You keep heading east, you know. That is the direction from which the sun has been known to take its course."

I felt my face flush.

"There was an accident," I said, looking away. "We lost a horse."

"What sort of accident?"

"A serious one—for the horse."

"Benedict," said Random, suddenly looking up from what I realized to be the pierced Trump, "what can you tell me concerning my son Martin?"

Benedict studied him for several long moments before he spoke. Then, "Why the sudden interest?" he asked.

"Because I have reason to be-

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lieve he may be dead," he said. "If that is the case, I want to avenge it. If it is not the case— Well, the thought that it might be has caused me some upset. If he is still living, I would like to meet him and talk with him."

"What makes you think he might be dead?"

Random glanced at me. I nodded.

"Start with breakfast," I said.

"While he is doing that, I'll find us lunch," said Ganelon, rummaging in one of the bags.

"The unicorn showed us the way . . ." Random began.

III.

WE SAT IN SILENCE. Random had finished speaking and Benedict was staring skywards over Garnath. His face betrayed nothing. I had long ago learned to respect his silence.

At length, he nodded, once, sharply, and turned to regard Random.

"I have long suspected something of this order," he stated, "from things that Dad and Dworkin let fall over the years. I had the impression there was a primal Pattern which they had either located or created, situating our Amber but a shadow away to draw upon its forces. I never obtained any notion as to how one might travel to that place, however." He turned back toward Garnath, gesturing with his chin. "And that, you tell me, corresponds to what was done there?"

"It seems to," Random replied.

"—Brought about by the shedding of Martin's blood?"

"I think so."

Benedict raised the Trump Random had passed him during his narration. At that time, Benedict had made no comment.

"Yes," he said now, "this is Martin. He came to me after he departed Rebma. He stayed with me a long while."

"Why did he go to you?" Random asked.

Benedict smiled faintly.

"He had to go somewhere, you know," he said. "He was sick of his position in Rebma, ambivalent toward Amber, young, free and just come into his power through the Pattern. He wanted to get away, see new things, travel in Shadow—as we all did. I had taken him to Avalon once when he was a small boy, to let him walk on dry land of a summer, to teach him to ride a horse and have him see a crop harvested. When he was suddenly in a position to go anywhere he would in an instant, his choices were still restricted to the few places of which he had knowledge. True, he might have dreamed up a place in that instant and gone there—creating it, as it were. But he was also aware that he still had many things to learn, to insure his safety in Shadow. So he elected to come to me, to ask me to teach him. And I did. He spent the better part of a year at my place. I taught him to fight, taught him of the ways of the Trumps and of Shadow, instructed him in those things an Amberite must know if he is to survive."

"Why did you do all these things?" Random asked.

"Someone had to. It was me that he came to, so it was mine to do,"

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Benedict replied. "It was not as if I were not very fond of the boy, though," he added.

Random nodded.

"You say that he was with you for almost a year. What became of him after that?"

"That wanderlust you know as well as I. Once he had obtained some confidence in his abilities, he wanted to exercise them. In the course of instructing him, I had taken him on journeys in Shadow myself, had introduced him to people of my aquaintance at various places. But there came a time when he wanted to make his own way. One day then, he bade me good-bye and fared forth."

"Have you seen him since?" Random asked.

"Yes. He returned periodically, staying with me for a time, to tell me of his adventures, his discoveries. It was always clear that it was just a visit. After a time, he would get restless and depart again."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Several years ago, Avalon time, under the usual circumstances. He showed up one morning, stayed for perhaps two weeks, told me of the things he had seen and done, talked of the many things he wanted to do. Later, he set off once more."

"And you never heard from him again?"

"On the contrary. There were messages left with mutual friends when he would pass their way. Occasionally, he would even contact me via my Trump—"

"He had a set of the Trumps?" I broke in.

"Yes, I made him a gift of one of my extra decks."

"Did you have a Trump for him?"

He shook his head.

"I was not even aware that such a Trump existed, until I saw this one," he said, raising the card, glancing at it and passing it back to Random. "I haven't the art to prepare one. Random, have you tried reaching him with this Trump?"

"Yes, any number of times since we came across it. Just a few minutes ago, as a matter of fact. Nothing."

"Of course that proves nothing. If everything occurred as you guessed and he did survive it, he may have resolved to block any future attempts at contact. He does know how to do that."

"Did it occur as I guessed? Do you know more about it?"

"I have an idea," Benedict said. "You see, he did show up injured at a friend's place—off in Shadow—some years ago. It was a body wound, caused by the thrust of a blade. They said he came to them in very bad shape and did not go into details as to what had occurred. He remained for a few days—until he was able to get around again—and departed before he was really fully recovered. That was the last they heard of him. The last that I did, also."

"Weren't you curious?" Random asked. "Didn't you go looking for him?"

"Of course I was curious. I still am. But a man should have the right to lead his own life without the meddling of relatives, no matter

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how well-intentioned. He had pulled through the crisis and he did not attempt to contact me. He apparently knew what he wanted to do. He did leave a message for me with the Tecys, saying that when I learned of what had happened I was not to worry, that he knew what he was about."

"The Tecys?" I said.

"That's right. Friends of mine off in Shadow."

I refrained from saying the things that I might. I had thought them just another part of Dara's story, for she had so twisted the truth in other areas. She had mentioned the Tecys to me as if she knew them, as if she had stayed with them—all with Benedict's knowledge. The moment did not seem appropriate, however, to tell him of my previous night's vision in Tir-na Nog'th and the things it had indicated concerning his relationship to the girl. I had not yet had sufficient time to ponder the matter and all that it implied.

Random stood, paced, paused near the ledge, his back to us, fingers knotted behind him. After a moment, he turned and stalked back.

"How can we get in touch with the Tecys?" he asked Benedict.

"No way," said Benedict, "except to go and see them."

Random turned to me.

"Corwin, I need a horse. You say that Star's been through a number of hellrides . . ."

"He's had a busy morning."

"It wasn't that strenuous. It was mostly fright, and he seems okay now. May I borrow him?"

Before I could answer, he turned toward Benedict.

"You'll take me, won't you?" he said.

Benedict hesitated.

"I do not know what more there is to learn—" he began.

"Anything! Anything at all they might remember—possibly something that did not really seem important at the time but is now, knowing what we know."

Benedict looked to me. I nodded.

"He can ride Star, if you are willing to take him."

"All right," Benedict said, getting to his feet. "I'll fetch my mount."

He turned and headed off toward the place where the great striped beast was tethered.

"Thanks, Corwin," Random said.

"I'll let you do me a favor in return."

"What?"

"Let me borrow Martin's Trump."

"What for?"

"An idea just hit me. It is too complicated to get into if you want to get moving. No harm should come of it, though."

He chewed his lip.

"Okay. I want it back when you are done with it."

"Of course."

"Will it help find him?"

"Maybe."

He passed me the card.

"You heading back to the palace now?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Would you tell Vialle what has happened and where I have gone? She worries."

"Sure. I'll do that."

"I'll take good care of Star."

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"I know that. Good luck."

"Thanks."

* * *

I rode Firedrake. Ganelon walked. He had insisted. We followed the route I had taken in pursuing Dara on the day of the battle. Along with recent developments, that is probably what made me think of her again. I dusted off my feelings and examined them carefully. I realized then that despite the games she had played with me, the killings she had doubtless been privy or party to and her stated designs upon the realm, I was still attracted to her by something more than curiosity. I was not really surprised to discover this. Things had looked pretty much the same the last time I had pulled a surprise inspection in the emotional barracks. I wondered then how much of truth there might have been to my final vision of the previous night, wherein her possible line of descent from Benedict had been stated. There was indeed a physical resemblance, and I was more than half-convinced. In the ghost city, of course, the shade of Benedict had conceded as much, raising his new, strange arm in her defense . . .

"What's funny?" Ganelon asked, from where he strode to my left.

"The arm," I said, "that came to me from Tir-na Nog'th— I had worried over some hidden import, some unforeseen force of destiny to the thing, coming as it had into our world from that place of mystery and dream. Yet it did not even last the day. Nothing remained when the Pattern destroyed Iago. The entire evening's visions came to nothing."

Ganelon cleared his throat.

"Well, it wasn't exactly the way you seem to think," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"That arm device was not in Iago's saddlebag. Random stowed it in your bag. That's where the food was, and after we had eaten he returned the utensiles to where they had been in his own bag, but not the arm. There was no space."

"Oh," I said. "Then—"

Ganelon nodded.

"—So he has it with him now," he finished.

"The arm and Benedict both. Damn! I've small liking for that thing. It tried to kill me. No one has ever been attacked in Tir-na Nog'th before."

"But Benedict, Benedict's okay. He's on our side, even if you have some differences at the moment. Right?"

I did not answer him.

He reached up and took firedrake's reins, drawing him to a halt. He stared up then, studying my face.

"Corwin, what happened up there, anyway? What did you learn?"

I hesitated. In truth, what had I learned in the city in the sky? No one was certain as to the mechanism behind the visions of Tir-na Nog'th. It could well be, as we have sometimes suspected, that the place simply served to objectify one's unspoken fears and desires, mixing them perhaps with unconscious guesswork. Sharing conclusions and reasonably based conjectures was one thing. Sus-

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picions engendered by something unknown were likely better retained than given currency. Still, that arm was solid enough . . .

"I told you," I said, "that I had knocked that arm off the ghost of Benedict. Obviously, we were fighting."

"You see it then as an omen that you and Benedict will eventually be in conflict?"

"Perhaps."

"You were shown a reason for it, weren't you?"

"Okay," I said, finding a sigh without trying. "Yes. It was indicated that Dara was indeed related to Benedict—a thing which may well be correct. It is also quite possible, if it is true, that he is unaware of it. Therefore, we keep quiet about it until we can verify it or discount it. Understood?"

"Of course. But how could this thing be?"

"Just as she said."

"Great-granddaughter?"

I nodded.

"By whom?"

"The hellmaid we knew only by reputation—Lintra, the lady who cost him his arm."

"But that battle was only a recent thing."

"Time flows differently in different realms of Shadow, Ganelon. In the farther reaches— It would not be impossible."

He shook his head and relaxed his grip on the reins.

"Corwin, I really think Benedict should know about this," he said. "If it is true, you ought to give him a chance to prepare himself rather than let him discover it of a sudden. You people are such an infertile lot that paternity seems to hit you harder than it does others. Look at Random. For years, he had disowned his son, and now— I've a feeling he'd risk his life for him."

"So do I," I said. "Now forget the first part but carry the second one a step further in the case of Benedict."

"You think he would take Dara's side against Amber?"

"I would rather avoid presenting him with the choice by not letting him know that it exists—if it exists."

"I think you do him a disservice. He is hardly an emotional infant. Get hold of him on the Trump and tell him your suspicions. That way, at least, he can be thinking about it, rather than have him risk some sudden confrontation unprepared."

"He would not believe me. You have seen how he gets whenever I mention Dara."

"That in itself may say something. Possibly he suspects what might have happened and rejects it so vehemently because he would have it otherwise."

"Right now it would just widen a rift I am trying to heal."

"Your holding back on him now may serve to rupture it completely when he finds out."

"No. I believe I know my brother better than you do."

He released the reins.

"Very well," he said. "I hope you are right."

I did not answer, but started Firedrake to moving once more. There was an unspoken understanding between us that Ganelon could ask me anything he wanted, and it also went without saying that

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I would listen to any advice he had to offer me. This was partly because his position was unique. We were not related. He was no Amberite. The struggles and problems of Amber were his only by choice. We had been friends and then enemies long ago, and finally, more recently, friends again and allies in a battle in his adopted land. That matter concluded, he had asked to come with me, to help me deal with my own affairs and those of Amber. As I saw it, he owed me nothing now, nor I him—if one keeps a scoreboard tally on such matters. Therefore, it was friendship alone that bound us, a stronger thing than bygone debts and points of honor: in other words, a thing which gave him the right to bug me on matters such as this, where I might have told even Random to go to hell once I had made up my mind. I realized I should not be irritated when everything that he said was tendered in good faith. Most likely it was an old military feeling, going back to our earliest relationship as well as being tied in with the present state of affairs: I do not like having my decisions and orders questioned. Probably, I decided, I was irritated even more by the fact that he had made some shrewd guesses of late, and some fairly sound suggestions based upon them—things I felt I ought to have caught myself. No one likes to admit to a resentment based on something like that. Still . . . Was that all? A simple projection of dissatisfaction over a few instances of personal inadequacy? An old Army reflex as to the sanctity of my decisions? Or was it something deeper that had been bothering me and was just now coming to the surface?

"Corwin," Ganelon said, "I've been doing some thinking . . ."

I sighed.

"Yes?"

". . . . about Random's son. The way your crowd heals, I suppose it is possible that he might have survived and still be about."

"I would like to think so."

"Do not be too hasty."

"What do you mean?"

"I gather he had very little contact with Amber and the rest of the family, growing up in Rebma the way that he did."

"That is the way I understand it, too."

"In fact, outside of Benedict—and Llewella, back in Rebma—the only other one he apparently had contact with would have been the one who stabbed him—Bleys, Brand or Fiona. It has occurred to me that he probably has a pretty distorted view of the family."

"Distorted," I said, "but maybe not unwarranted, if I see what you are getting at."

"I think you do. It seems conceivable that he is not only afraid of the family, but may have it in for the lot of you."

"It is possible," I said.

"Do you think he could have thrown in with the enemy?"

I shook my head.

"Not if he knows they are the tools of the crowd that tried to kill him."

"But are they? I wonder. . . ? You say Brand got scared and tried to back out of whatever arrangement they had with the black road

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gang. If they are that strong, I wonder whether Fiona and Bleys might not have become *their* tools? If this were the case, I could see Martin angling for something which gave him power over them."

"Too elaborate a structure of guesses," I said.

"The enemy seems to know a lot about you."

"True, but they had a couple traitors to give them lessons."

"Could they have given them everything you say Dara knew?"

"That is a good point," I said, "but it is hard to say." Except for the business about the Tecys which occurred to me immediately. I decided to keep that to myself for the moment though, to find out what he was leading up to, rather than going off on a tangent. So, "Martin was hardly in a position to tell them much about Amber," I said.

Ganelon was silent for a moment. Then, "Have you had a chance to check on the business I asked you about that night at your tomb?" he said.

"What business?"

"Whether the Trumps could be bugged," he said. "Now that we know Martin had a deck . . ."

It was my turn to be silent while a small family of moments crossed my path, single file, from the left, sticking their tongues out at me.

"No," I said then. "I haven't had a chance."

We proceeded on for quite a distance before he said, "Corwin, the night you brought Brand back. . . ?"

"Yes?"

"You say you accounted for everyone later, in trying to figure out who it was that stabbled you, and that any of them would have been hard put to pull the stunt in the time involved."

"Oh," I said, "and oh."

He nodded.

"Now you have another relative to think about. He may lack the family finesse only because he is young and unpracticed."

Sitting there in my mind, I gestured back at the silent parade of moments that crossed between Amber and then.

IV.

SHE ASKED who it was when I knocked and I told her.

"Just a moment."

I heard her footsteps and then the door swung in. Vialle is only a little over five feet tall and quite slim. Brunette, fine-featured, very softspoken. She was wearing red. Her sightless eyes looked through me, reminding me of darkness past, of pain.

"Random," I said, "asked me to tell you that he would be delayed a little longer, but that there was nothing to worry about."

"Please come in," she said, stepping aside and drawing the door the rest of the way open.

I did. I did not want to, but I did. I had not intended to take Random's request literally—that I tell her what had happened and where he had gone. I had meant simply to tell her what I had already said, nothing more. It was not until we had ridden our separate ways that I realized exactly what

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Random's request had amounted to: He had just asked me to go tell his wife, to whom I had never spoken more than half a dozen words, that he had taken off to go looking for his illegitimate son—the lad whose mother, Morganthe, had committed suicide, a thing for which Random had been punished by being forced to marry Vialle. The fact that the marriage had somehow worked beautifully was something which still amazed me. I had no desire to dispense a load of awkward tidings, and as I moved into the room I sought alternatives.

I passed a bust of Random set on a high shelf on the wall to my left. I had actually gone by before it registered that my brother was indeed the subject. Across the room, I saw her workbench. Turning back, I studied the bust.

"I did not realize that you sculpted," I said.

"Yes."

Casting my gaze about the apartment, I quickly located other examples of her work.

"Quite good," I said.

"Thank you. Won't you sit down?"

I lowered myself into a large, high-armed chair which proved more comfortable than it had looked. She seated herself on a low divan to my right, curling her legs beneath her.

"May I get you something to eat, or to drink?"

"No thanks. I can only stay a short while. What it is, is that Random, Ganelon and I had gotten a bit sidetracked on the way home, and after that delay we met with Benedict for a time. The upshot of

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it was that Random and Benedict had to make another small journey."

"How long will he be away?"

"Probably overnight. Maybe a bit longer. If it is going to be much longer he will probably call back on someone's Trump, and we'll let you know."

My side began to throb and I rested my hand upon it, massaging it gently.

"Random has told me many things about you," she said.

I chuckled.

"Are you certain you would not care for something to eat? It would be no trouble."

"Did he tell you that I am always hungry?"

She laughed.

"No. But if you have been as active as you say, I would guess that you did not take time for lunch."

"In that you would be only half-correct. All right. If you've a spare piece of bread lying about it might do me some good to gnaw on it."

"Fine. Just a moment."

She rose and departed into the next room. I took the opportunity to scratch heartily all about my wound where it was suddenly itching fit to kill. I had accepted her hospitality partly for this reason and partly because of the realization that I actually was hungry. Only a little later it struck me that she could not have seen me attacking my side as I was. Her sure movements, her confident manner had relaxed my awareness of her blindness. Good. It pleased me that she was able to carry it so well.

I heard her humming a tune: "The Ballad of the Water Crossers," the song of Amber's great merchant navy. Amber is not noted for manufacture, and agriculture has never been our forte. But our ships sail the shadows, plying between anywhere and anywhere, dealing in anything. Just about every male Amberite, noble or otherwise, spends some time in the fleet. Those of the blood laid down the trade routes long ago that other vessels might follow, the seas of a double dozen worlds in every captain's head. I had assisted in this in times gone by, and though my involvement had never been so deep as Gérard's or Caine's, I had been mightily moved by the forces of the deep and the spirit of the men who crossed it.

After a while, Vialle came in bearing a tray heavy with bread, meat, cheese, fruit and a flask of wine. She set it upon a table near at hand.

"You mean to feed a regiment?" I asked.

"Best to be safe."

"Thanks. Won't you join me?"

"A piece of fruit, perhaps," she said.

Her fingers sought for a second, located an apple. She returned to the divan.

"Random tells me you wrote that song," she said.

"That was a very long time ago, Vialle."

"Have you composed any recently?"

I began to shake my head, caught myself, said, "No. That part of me is . . . resting."

"Pity. It is lovely."

"Random is the real musician."

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"Yes, he is very good. But performance and composition are two different things."

"True. One day when things have eased up . . . Tell me, are you happy here in Amber? Is everything to your liking? Is there anything that you need?"

She smiled.

"All that I need is Random. He is a good man."

I was strangely moved to hear her speak of him in this fashion.

"Then I am happy for you," I said, And, "Younger, smaller . . . he might have had it a bit rougher than the rest of us," I went on. "Nothing quite as useless as another prince when there is already a crowd of them about. I was as guilty as the rest. Bleys and I once stranded him for two days on an islet to the south of here . . ."

". . . . And Gérard went and got him when he learned of it," she said. "Yes, he told me. It must bother you if you remember it after all this time."

"It must have made an impression on him, too."

"No, he forgave you long ago. He told it as a joke. Also, he drove a spike through the heel of your boot—pierced your foot when you put it on."

"Then it *was* Random! I'll be damned! I had always blamed Julian for that one."

"That one bothers Random."

"How long ago all of this was . . ." I said. I shook my head and continued eating. Hunger seized me and she gave me several minutes of silence in which to get the upper hand on it. When I had, I felt compelled to say something.

"That is better. Much better," I began. "It was a peculiar and trying night that I spent in the sky-city."

"Did you receive omens of a useful nature?"

"I do not know how useful they might prove. On the other hand, I suppose I'd rather have had them than not. Have there been any interesting happenings hereabouts?"

"A servant tells me your brother Brand continues to rally. He ate well this morning, which is encouraging."

"True," I said. "True. It would seem he is out of danger."

"Likely. It— It is a terrible series of happenings to which you have all been subjected. I am sorry. I was hoping you might obtain some indication of an upturn in your affairs during the night you spent in Tir-na Nog'th."

"It does not matter," I said. "I am not that sure of the value of the thing."

"Then why— Oh."

I studied her with renewed interest. Her face still betrayed nothing, but her right hand twitched, tapping and plucking at the material of the divan. Then, as with a sudden awareness of its eloquence, she stilled it. She was obviously a person who had answered her own question and wished now she had done it in silence.

"Yes," I said, "I was stalling. You are aware of my injury."

She nodded.

"I am not angry with Random for having told you," I said. "His judgment has always been acute and geared to defense. I see no reason not to rely on it myself. I must inquire as to how much he has told

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you, however, both for your own safety and my peace of mind. For there are things I suspect but have not yet spoken."

"I understand. It is difficult to assess a negative—the things he might have left out, I mean—but he tells me most things. I know your story and most of the others'. He keeps me aware of events, suspicions, conjectures."

"Thank you," I said, taking a sip of the wine. "It makes it easier for me to speak then, seeing how things are with you. I am going to tell you everything that happened from breakfast till now . . ."

So I did.

She smiled occasionally as I spoke, but she did not interrupt. When I had finished, she asked, "You thought that mention of Martin would upset me?"

"It seemed possible," I told her.

"No," she said. "You see, I knew Martin in Rebma, when he was but a small boy. I was there while he was growing up. I liked him then. Even if he were not Random's son he would still be dear to me. I can only be pleased with Random's concern and hope that it has come in time to benefit them both."

I shook my head.

"I do not meet people like you too often," I said. "I am glad that I finally have."

She laughed, then said, "You were without sight for a long while."

"Yes."

"It can embitter a person, or it can give him a greater joy in those things which he does have."

I did not have to think back over my feelings from those days of blindness to know that I was a person of the first sort, even discounting the circumstances under which I had suffered it. I am sorry, but that is the way that I am, and I am sorry.

"True," I said. "You are fortunate."

"It is really only a state of mine—a thing a Lord of Shadow can easily appreciate."

She rose.

"I have always wondered as to your appearance," she said. "Random has described you, but that is different. May I?"

"Of course."

She approached and placed her fingertips upon my face. Delicately, she traced my features.

"Yes," she said, "you are much as I had thought you would be. And I feel the tension in you. It has been there for a long while, has it not?"

"In some form or other, I suppose, ever since my return to Amber."

"I wonder," she said, "whether you might have been happier before you regained your memory."

"It is one of those impossible questions," I said. "I might also be dead if I had not. But putting that part aside for a moment, in those times there was still a thing that drove me, that troubled me every day. I was constantly looking for ways to discover who I really was, what I was."

"But were you happier, or less happy, than you are now?"

"Neither," I said. "Things balance out. It is, as you suggested, a state of mind. And even if it were not so, I could never go back to

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that other life, now that I know who I am, now that I have found Amber."

"Why not?"

"Why do you ask me these things?"

"I want to understand you," she said. "Ever since I first heard of you back in Rebma, even before Random told me stories, I wondered what it was that drove you. Now I've the opportunity—no right, of course, just the opportunity—I felt it worth speaking out of turn and order beyond my station simply to ask you."

A half-chuckle caught me.

"Fairly taken," I said. "I will see whether I can be honest. Hatred drove me at first—hatred for my brother Eric—and my desire for the throne. Had you asked me on my return which was the stronger, I would have said that it was the summons of the throne. Now, though . . . Now I would have to admit that it was actually the other way around. I had not realized it until this moment, but it is true. But Eric is dead and there is nothing left of what I felt then. The throne remains, but now I find that my feelings toward it are mixed. There is a possibility that none of us has a right to it under present circumstances, and even if all family objections were removed I would not take it at this time. I would have to see stability restored to the realm and a number of questions answered first."

"Even if these things showed that you may not have the throne?"

"Even so."

"Then I begin to understand."

"Understand what?"

"Lord Corwin, my knowledge of the philosophical bases of these things is limited, but it is my understanding that you are able to find anything you wish within Shadow. This has troubled me for a long while, and I never fully understood Random's explanations. If you wished, could not each of you walk in Shadow and find yourself another Amber—like this one in all respects, save that you ruled there or enjoyed whatever other status you might desire?"

"Yes, we could locate such places," I said.

"Then why is this not done, to have an end of strife?"

"It is because a place could be found which *seemed* to be the same—but that would be all. We are a part of this Amber as surely as it is a part of us. Any shadow of Amber would have to be populated with shadows of ourselves to seem worthwhile. We could even except our own person should we choose to move into a ready realm. However, the shadow folk would not be exactly like the other people here. A shadow is never precisely like that which casts it. These little differences add up. They are actually worse than major ones. It would amount to entering a nation of strangers. The best mundane comparison which occurs to me is an encounter with a person who strongly resembles another person you know. You keep expecting him to act like your acquaintance; worse yet, you have a tendency to act toward him as you would toward that other. You face him with a certain mask and his responses are not appropriate. It is an uncom-

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fortable feeling. I never enjoy meeting people who remind me of other people. Personality is the one thing we cannot control in our manipulations of Shadow. In fact, it is the means by which we can tell one another from shadows of themselves. This is why Flora could not decide about me for so long, back on the shadow Earth: my new personality was sufficiently different."

"I begin to understand," she said. "It is not just Amber for you. It is the place plus everything else."

"The place plus everything else . . . *That* is Amber," I agreed.

"You say that your hate died with Eric and your desire for the throne has been tempered by the consideration of new things you have learned."

"That is so."

"Then I think I do understand what it is that moves you."

"The desire for stability moves me," I said, "and something of curiosity—and revenge on our enemies . . ."

"Duty," she said. "Of course."

I snorted.

"It would be comforting to put such a face on it," I said. "As it is, however, I will not be a hypocrite. I am hardly a dutiful son of Amber or of Oberon."

"Your voice makes it plain that you do not wish to be considered one."

I closed my eyes, closed them to join her in darkness, to recall for a brief while the world where other messages than light waves took precedence. I knew then that she had been right about my voice. Why had I trodden so heavily on the idea of duty as soon as it was suggested? I like credit for being good and clean and noble and high-minded when I have it coming, even sometimes when I do not—the same as the next person. What bothered me about the notion of duty of Amber? Nothing. What was it then?

Dad.

I no longer owed him anything, least of all duty. Ultimately, he was responsible for the present state of affairs. He had fathered a great brood of us without providing for a proper succession, he had been less than kind to all of our mothers and he then expected our devotion and support. He played favorites and, in fact, it even seemed he played us off against one another. He then got suckered into something he could not handle and left the kingdom in a mess. Sigmund Freud had long ago anesthetized me to any normal, generalized feelings of resentment which might operate within the family unit. I have no quarrel on those grounds. Facts are another matter. I did not dislike my father simply because he had given me no reason to like him; in truth, it seemed that he had labored in the other direction. Enough. I realized what it was that bothered me about the notion of duty: its object.

"You are right," I said, opening my eyes, regarding her, "and I am glad that you told me of it."

I rose.

"Give me your hand," I said.

She extended her right hand and I raised it to my lips.

"Thank you," I said. "It was a good lunch."

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I turned and made my way to the door. When I looked back she had blushed and was smiling, her hand still partly raised, and I began to understand the change in Random.

"Good luck to you," she said, the moment my footsteps ceased.

". . . . And you," I said, and went out quickly.

* * *

I had been planning to see Brand next, but just could not bring myself to do it. For one thing, I did not want to encounter him with my wits dulled by fatigue. For another, talking with Vialle was the first pleasant thing which had happened to me in some time, and just this once I was going to quit while I was ahead.

I mounted the stair and walked the corridor to my room, thinking of course of the night of the knifings as I fitted my new key to my new lock. In my bed chamber, I drew the drapes against the afternoon's light, undressed and got into bed. As on other occasions of rest after stress with more stress pending, sleep eluded me for a time. For a long while I tossed and twisted, reliving events of the past several days and some from even farther back. When finally I slept, my dreams were an amalgam of the same material, including a spell in my old cell, scraping away at the door.

It was dark when I awoke and I actually felt rested. The tension gone out of me, my reverie was much more peaceful. In fact, there was a tiny charge of pleasant excitement dancing through the back of my head. It was a tip-of-the-tongue imperative, a buried notion that—

Yes!

I sat up. I reached for my clothes, began to dress. I buckled on Grayswandir. I folded a blanket and tucked it under my arm. Of course . . .

My mind felt clear and my side had stopped throbbing. I had no idea how long I had slept, and it was hardly worth checking at this point. I had something far more important to look into, something which should have occurred to me a long while ago—had occurred, as a matter of fact. I had actually been staring right at it once, but the crush of time and events had ground it from my mind. Until now.

I locked my room behind me and headed for the stair. Candles flickered, and the faded stag who had been dying for centuries on the tapestry to my right looked back on the faded dogs who had been pursuing him for approximately as long. Sometimes my sympathies are with the stag; usually though, I am all dog. Have to have the thing restored one of these days.

The stairs and down. No sounds from below. Late, then. Good. Another day and we're still alive. Maybe even a trifle wiser. Wise enough to realize there are many more things we still need to know. Hope, though. There's that. A thing I lacked when I squatted in that damned cell, hands pressed against my ruined eyes, howling. Vialle . . . I wish I could have spoken with you for a few moments in those days. But I learned what I learned in a nasty school, and even

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a milder curriculum would probably not have given me your grace. Still . . . Hard to say. I have always felt I am more dog than stag, more hunter than victim. You might have taught me something that would have blunted the bitterness, tempered the hate. But would that have been for the best? The hate died with its object and the bitterness, too, has passed—but looking back, I wonder whether I would have made it without them to sustain me. I am not at all certain that I would have survived my internment without my ugly companions to drag me back to life and sanity time and again. Now I can afford the luxury of an occasional stag-thought, but then it might have been fatal. I do not truly know, kind lady, and I doubt that I ever will.

Stillness on the second floor. A few noises from below. Sleep well, lady. Around, and down again. I wondered whether Random had uncovered anything of great moment. Probably not, or he or Benedict should have contacted me by now. Unless there was trouble. But no. It is ridiculous to shop for worries. The real thing makes itself felt in due course, and I'd more than enough to go around.

The ground floor.

"Will," I said, and, "Rolf."

"Lord Corwin."

The two guards had assumed professional stances on hearing my footsteps. Their faces told me that all was well, but I asked for the sake of form.

"Quiet, Lord. Quiet," replied the senior.

"Very good," I said, and I continued on, entering and crossing the marble dining hall.

It would work, I was sure of that, if time and moisture had not totally effaced it. And then . . .

I entered the long corridor, where the dusty walls pressed close on either side. Darkness, shadows, my footsteps . . .

I came to the door at the end, opened it, stepped out onto the platform. Then down once more, that spiralling way, a light here, a light there, into the caverns of Kolvir. Random had been right, I decided then. If you had gouged out everything, down to the level of that distant floor, there would be a close correspondence between what was left and the place of that primal Pattern we had visited this morning.

. . . On down. Twisting and winding through the gloom. The torch and lantern-lit guard station was theatrically stark within it. I reached the floor and headed that way.

"Good evening, Lord Corwin," said the lean, cadaverous figure who rested against a storage rack, smoking his pipe, grinning around it.

"Good evening, Roger. How are things in the nether world?"

"A rat, a bat, a spider. Nothing much else astir. Peaceful."

"You enjoy this duty?"

He nodded.

"I am writing a philosophical romance shot through with elements of horror and morbidity. I work on those parts down here."

"Fitting, fitting," I said. "I'll be needing a lantern."

He took one from the rack, brought it to flame from his candle.

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"Will it have a happy ending?" I inquired.

He shrugged.

"I'll be happy."

"I mean, does good triumph and hero bed heroine? Or do you kill everybody off?"

"That's hardly fair," he said.

"Never mind. Maybe I'll read it one day."

"Maybe," he said.

I took the lantern and turned away, heading in a direction I had not taken in a long while. I discovered that I could still measure the echoes in my mind.

Before too long, I neared the wall, sighted the proper corridor, entered it. It was simply a matter of counting my paces then. My feet knew the way.

The door to my old cell stood partly ajar. I set down the lantern and used both hands to open it fully. It gave way grudgingly, moaning as it moved. Then I raised the lantern, held it high and entered.

My flesh tingled and my stomach clenched itself within me. I began to shiver. I had to fight down a strong impulse to bolt and run. I had not anticipated such a reaction. I did not want to step away from that heavy brassbound door for fear that it would be slammed and bolted behind me. It was an instant close to pure terror that the small dirty cell had aroused in me. I forced myself to dwell on particulars—the hole which had been my latrine, the blackened spot where I had built my fire on that final day. I ran my left hand over the inner surface of the door, finding and tracing there the grooves I had worn while scraping away with my spoon. I remembered what the activity had done to my hands. I stooped to examine the gouging. Not nearly so deep as it had seemed at the time, not when compared to the total thickness of the door. I realized how much I had exaggerated the effects of that feeble effort toward freedom. I stepped past it and regarded the wall.

Faint. Dust and moisture had worked to undo it. But I could still discern the outlines of the lighthouse of Cabra, bordered by four slashes of my old spoon handle. The magic was still there, that force which had finally transported me to freedom. I felt it without calling upon it.

I turned and faced the other wall.

The sketch which I now regarded had fared less well than that of the lighthouse, but then it had been executed with extreme haste by the light of my last few matches. I could not even make out all of the details, though my memory furnished a few of those which were hidden: It was a view of a den or library, bookshelves lining the walls, a desk in the foreground, a globe beside the desk. I wondered whether I should risk wiping it clean.

I set my lantern on the floor, returned to the sketch on the other wall. With a corner of my blanket, I gently wiped some dust from a point near the base of the lighthouse. The line grew clearer. I wiped it again, exerting a little more pressure. Unfortunate. I destroyed an inch or so of outline.

I stepped back and tore a wide strip from the edge of the blanket. I folded what remained into a pad and seated myself on it. Slowly,

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carefully then, I set to work on the lighthouse. I had to get an exact feeling for the work before I tried cleaning the other one.

Half an hour later I stood up and stretched, bent and massaged life back into my legs. What remained of the lighthouse was clean. Unfortunately, I had destroyed about twenty percent of the sketch before I developed a sense of the wall's texture and an appropriate stroke across it. I doubted that I was going to improve any further.

The lantern sputtered as I moved it. I unfolded the blanket, shook it out, tore off a fresh strip. Making up a new pad, I knelt before the other sketch and set to work.

Awhile later I had uncovered what remained of it. I had forgotten the skull on the desk until a careful stroke revealed it once again—and the angle of the far wall, and a tall candlestick . . . I drew back. It would be risky to do any more rubbing. Probably unnecessary, also. It seemed about as entire as it had been.

The lantern was flickering once again. Cursing Roger for not checking the kerosene level, I stood and held the light at shoulder level off to my left. I put everything from my mind but the scene before me.

I gained something of perspective as I stared. A moment later and it was totally three-dimensional and had expanded to fill my entire field of vision. I stepped forward then and rested the lantern on the edge of the desk.

I cast my eyes about the place. There were bookshelves on all four walls. No windows. Two doors at the far end of the room, right and left, across from one another, one closed, the other partly ajar. There was a long, low table covered with books and papers beside the opened door. Bizarre curios occupied open spaces on the shelves and odd niches and recesses in the walls—bones, stones, pottery, inscribed tablets, lenses, wands, instruments of unknown function. The huge rug resembled an Ardebil. I took a step toward that end of the room and the lantern sputtered again. I turned and reached for it. At that moment, it failed.

I growled an obscenity and lowered my hand. Then I turned, slowly, to check for any possible light sources. Something resembling a branch of coral shone faintly on a shelf across the room and a pale line of illumination occurred at the base of the closed door. I abandoned the lantern and crossed the room.

I opened the door as quietly as I could. The room it let upon was deserted, a small, windowless living place faintly illuminated by the still smouldering embers in its single, recessed hearth. The room's walls were of stone and they arched above me. The fireplace was a possibly natural niche in the wall to my left. A large, armored door was set in the far wall, a big key partly turned in its lock.

I entered, taking a candle from a nearby table, and moved toward the fireplace to give it a light. As I knelt and sought a flame among the embers, I heard a soft footfall in the vicinity of the doorway.

Turning, I saw him just beyond the threshold. About five feet in height, hunchbacked. His hair and

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beard were even longer than I remembered. Dworkin wore a nightshirt which reached to his ankles. He carried an oil lamp, his dark eyes peering across its sooty chimney.

"Oberon," he said, "is it finally time?"

"What time is that?" I asked softly.

He chuckled.

"What other? Time to destroy the world, of course!"

V.

I KEPT THE LIGHT away from my face, kept my voice low.

"Not quite," I said. "Not quite."

He sighed.

"You remain unconvinced."

He looked forward and cocked his head, peering down at me.

"Why must you spoil things?" he said.

"I've spoiled nothing."

He lowered the lamp. I turned my head again, but he finally got a good look at my face. He laughed.

"Funny. Funny, funny, funny," he said. "You come as the young Lord Corwin thinking to sway me with family sentiment. Why did you not choose Brand or Bleys? It was Clarissa's lot served us best."

I shrugged and stood.

"Yes and no," I said, determined now to feed him ambiguities for so long as he'd accept them and respond. Something of value might emerge, and it seemed an easy way to keep him in a good humor. "And yourself?" I continued. "What face would you put on things?"

"Why, to win your good will I'll match you," he said, and then he began to laugh.

He threw his head back, and as his laughter rang about me a change came over him. His stature seemed to increase, and his face luffed like a sail cut too close to the wind. The hump on his back was diminished as he straightened and stood taller. His features rearranged themselves and his beard darkened. By then it was obvious that he was somehow redistributing his body mass, for the nighshirt which had reached his ankles was now midway up his shins. He breathed deeply and his shoulders widened. His arms lengthened, his bulging abdomen narrowed, tapered. He reached shoulder height on me, then higher. He looked me in the eye. His garment reached only to his knees. His hump was totally restored. His face gave a final twist, his features steadied, were reset. His laughter fell to a chuckle, faded, closed with a smirk.

I regarded a slightly slimmer version of myself.

"Sufficient?" he inquired.

"Not half bad," I said. "Wait till I toss a couple logs on the fire."

"I will help you."

"That's all right."

I drew some wood from a rack to the right. Any stall served me somewhat, buying reactions for my study. As I was about the work, he crossed to a chair and seated himself. When I glanced at him I saw that he was not looking at me, but staring into the shadows. I drew out the fire-building, hoping that he would say something, anything. Eventually, he did.

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"Whatever became of the grand design?" he asked.

I did not know whether he was speaking of the Pattern or of some master plan of Dad's to which he had been privy. So, "You tell me," I said.

He chuckled again. "Why not? You changed your mind, that is what happened," he said.

"From what to what—as you see it?"

"Don't mock me. Even you have no right to mock me," he said. "Least of all, you."

I got to my feet.

"I was not mocking you," I said.

I crossed the room to another chair and carried it over to a position near the fire, across from Dworkin. I seated myself.

"How did you recognize me?" I asked.

"My whereabouts are hardly common knowledge."

"That is true."

"Do many in Amber think me dead?"

"Yes, and others suppose you might be traveling off in Shadow."

"I see."

"How have you been—feeling?"

He gave me an evil grin.

"Do you mean am I still mad?"

"You put it more bluntly than I care to."

"There is a fading, there is an intensifying," he said. "It comes to me and it departs again. For the moment I am almost myself—almost, I say. The shock of your visit, perhaps . . . Something is broken in my mind. You know that. It cannot be otherwise, though. You know that, too."

"I suppose that I do," I said. "Why don't you tell me all about it, all over again? Just the business of talking might make you feel better, might give me something I've missed. Tell me a story."

Another laugh.

"Anything you like. Have you any preferences? My flight from Chaos to this small sudden island in the sea of night? My meditations upon the abyss? The revelation of the Pattern in a jewel hung round the neck of a unicorn? My transcription of the design by lightning, blood and lyre while our fathers raged baffled, too late come to call me back while the poem of fire ran that first route in my brain, infecting me with the will to form? Too late! Too late . . . Possessed of the abominations born of the disease, beyond their aid, their power, I planned and built, captive of my new self. Is that the tale you'd hear again? Or rather I tell you of its cure?"

My mind spun at the implications he had just scattered by the fistful. I could not tell whether he spoke literally or metaphorically or was simply sharing paranoid delusions, but the things that I wanted to hear, had to hear, were things closer to the moment.

So, regarding the shadowy image of myself from which that ancient voice emerged, "Tell me of its cure," I said.

He braced his fingertips together and spoke through them.

"I am the Pattern," he said, "in a very real sense. In passing through my mind to achieve the form it now holds, the foundation of Amber, it marked me as surely

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as I marked it. I realized one day that I am both the Pattern and myself, and it was forced to become Dworkin in the process of becoming itself. There were mutual modifications in the birthing of this place and this time, and therein lay our weakness as well as our strength. For it occurred to me that damage to the Pattern would be damage to myself, and damage to myself would be reflected within the Pattern. Yet I could not be truly harmed because the Pattern protects me, and who but I could harm the Pattern? A beautiful closed system, it seemed, its weakness totally shielded by its strength."

He fell silent. I listened to the fire. I do not know what he listened to.

Then, "I was wrong," he said. "Such a simple matter, too . . . My blood, with which I drew it, could deface it. But it took me ages to realize that the blood of my blood could also do this thing. You could use it, you could also change it—yea, unto the third generation."

It did not come to me as a surprise, learning that he was grandsire to us all. Somehow, it seemed that I had known all along, had known but never voiced it. Yet . . . if anything, this raised more questions than it answered. *Collect one generation of ancestry. Proceed to confusion*. I had less idea now than ever before as to what Dworkin really was. Add to this the fact which even he acknowledged: It was a tale told by a madman.

"But to repair it. . . ?" I said.

He smirked, my own face twisting before me.

"Have you lost your taste to be a Lord of the living void, a king of chaos?" he asked.

"Mayhap," I replied.

"By the Unicorn thy mother, I knew it would come to this! The Pattern is as strong in you as is the greater realm. What then is your desire?"

"To preserve the realm."

He shook his/my head.

" 'Twould be simpler to destroy everything and try a new start—as I have told you so often before."

"I'm stubborn. So tell me again," I said, attempting to simulate Dad's gruffness.

He shrugged.

"Destroy the Pattern and we destroy Amber—and all of the shadows in polar array about it. Give me leave to destroy myself in the midst of the Pattern and we will obliterate it. Give me leave by giving me your word that you will then take the Jewel which contains the essence of order and use it to create a new Pattern, bright and pure, untainted, drawing upon the stuff of your own being while the legions of chaos attempt to distract you on every side. Promise me that and let me end it, for broken as I am, I would rather die for order than live for it. What say you now?"

"Would it not be better to try mending the one we've got than to undo the work of eons?"

"Coward!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "I knew you would say that again!"

"Well, wouldn't it?"

He began to pace.

"How many times have we been through this?" he asked. "Nothing has changed! You are afraid to try it!"

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"Perhaps," I said. "But do you not feel that something for which you have given so much is worth some effort—some additional sacrifice—if there is even a possibility of saving it?"

"You still do not understand," he said. "I cannot but think that a damaged thing should be destroyed—and hopefully replaced. The nature of my personal injury is such that I cannot envision repair. I am damaged in just this fashion. My feelings are foreordained."

If the Jewel can create a new Pattern, why will it not serve to repair the old one, end our troubles, heal your spirit?"

He approached and stood before me.

"Where is your memory?" he said. "You know that it would be infinitely more difficult to repair the damage than it would be to start over again. Have you forgotten what it is like out there?" He gestured toward the wall behind him. "Do you want to go and look at it again?"

"Yes," I said. "I would like that. Let's go."

I rose and looked down at him. His control over his form had begun slipping when he had grown angry. He had already lost three or four inches in height, the image of my face was melting back into his own gnome-like features and a noticeable bulge was growing between his shoulders, had already been visible when he had gestured.

His eyes widened and he studied my face.

"You really mean it," he said after a moment. "All right, then. Let us go."

He turned and moved toward the big metal door. I followed him. He used both hands to turn the key. Then he threw his weight against it. I moved to help him, but he brushed me aside with extraordinary strength before giving the door a final shove. It made a grating noise and moved outward into a fully opened position. I was immediately struck by a strange, somehow familiar odor.

Dworkin stepped through and paused. He located what looked to be a long staff leaning against the wall off to his right. He struck it several times against the ground and its upper end began to glow. It lit up the area fairly well, revealing a narrow tunnel into which he now advanced. I followed him and it widened before too long, so that I was able to come up abreast of him. The odor grew stronger, and I could almost place it. It had been something fairly recent . . .

It was close to eighty paces before our way took a turn to the left and upward. We passed then through a little appendix-like area. It was strewn with broken bones, and a large metal ring was set in the rock a couple feet above the floor. Affixed thereto was a glittering chain, which fell to the floor and trailed on ahead like a line of molten droplets cooling in the gloom.

Our way narrowed again after that and Dworkin took the lead once more. After a brief time, he turned an abrupt corner and I heard him muttering. I nearly ran into him when I made the turn myself. He was crouched down and groping with his left hand inside a shadowy cleft. When I heard the soft cawing

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noise and saw that the chain vanished into the opening I realized what it was and where we were.

"Good Wixer," I heard him say. "I am not going far. It is all right, good Wixer. Here is something to chew on."

From where he had fetched whatever he tossed the beast, I do not know. But the pruple griffin, which I had now advanced far enough to glimpse as it stirred within its lair, accepted the offering with a toss of its head and a series of crunching noises.

Dworkin grinned up at me.

"Surprised?" he asked.

"At what?"

"You thought I was afraid of him. You thought I would never make friends with him. You set him out here to keep me in there—away from the Pattern."

"Did I ever say that?"

"You did not have to. I am not a fool."

"Have it your way," I said.

He chuckled, rose and continued on along the passageway.

I followed and it grew level underfoot once again. The ceiling rose and the way widened. At length, we came to the cavemouth. Dworkin stood for a moment silhouetted, staff raised before him. It was night outside, and a clean salt smell swept the musk from my nostrils.

Another moment, and he moved forward once more, passing into a world of sky-candles and blue velours. Continuing after him, I had gasped briefly at the amazing view. It was not simply that the stars in the moonless, cloudless sky blazed with a preternatural brilliance, nor that the distinction between sky and sea had once again been totally obliterated. It was that the Pattern glowed an almost acetylene blue by the sky-sea, and all of the stars above, beside and below were arrayed with a geometric precision, forming a fantastic, oblique latticework which, more than anything else, gave the impression that we hung in the midst of a cosmic web where the Pattern was the true center, the rest of the radiant meshwork a precise consequence of its existence, configuration, position.

Dworkin continued on down to the Pattern, right up to the edge beside the darkened area. He waved his staff over it and turned to look at me just as I came near.

"There you are," he announced, "the hole in my mind. I can no longer think through it, only around it. I no longer know what must be done to repair something I now lack. If you think that you can do it, you must be willing to lay yourself open to instant destruction each time you depart the Pattern to cross the break. Not destruction by the dark portion. Destruction by the Pattern itself when you break the circuit. The Jewel may or may not sustain you. I do not know. But it will not grow easier. It will become more difficult with each circuit, and your strength will be lessening all the while. The last time we discussed it you were afraid. Do you mean to say you have grown bolder since then?"

"Perhaps," I said. "You see no other way?"

"I know it can be done starting with a clean slate, because once I

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did it so. Beyond that, I see no other way. The longer you wait the more the situtation worsens. Why not fetch the Jewel and lend me your blade, son? I see no better way."

"No," I said. "I must know more. Tell me again how the damage was done."

"I still do not know which of your children shed our blood on this spot, if this is what you mean. It was done. Let it go at that. Our darker natures came forth strongly in them. It must be that they are too close to the chaos from which we sprang; growing without the exercises of will we endured in defeating it. I had thought that the ritual of traveling the Pattern might suffice for them. I could think of nothing stronger. Yet it failed. They strike out against everything. They seek to destroy the Pattern itself."

"If we succeed in making a fresh start, might not these events simply repeat themselves?"

"I do not know. But what choice have we other than failure and a return to chaos?"

"What will become of them if we try for a new beginning?"

He was silent for a long while. Then he shrugged.

"I cannot tell."

"What would another generation have been like?"

He chuckled.

"How can such a question be answered? I have no idea."

I withdrew the mutilated Trump and passed it to him. He regarded it near the blaze of his staff.

"I believe it is Random's son Martin," I said, "he whose blood was spilled here. I have no idea whether he still lives. What do you think he might have amounted to?"

He looked back out over the Pattern.

"So this is the object which decorated it," he said. "How did you fetch it forth?"

"It was gotten," I said. "It is not your work, is it?"

"Of course not. I have never set eyes on the boy. But this answers your question, does it not? If there is another generation your children will destroy it."

"As we would destroy them?"

He met my eyes and peered.

"Is it that you are suddenly becoming a doting father?" he asked.

"If you did not prepare that Trump, who did?"

He glanced down and flicked it with his fingernail.

"My best pupil. Your son Brand. That is his style. See what they do as soon as they gain a little power? Would any of them offer their lives to preserve the realm, to restore the Pattern?"

"Probably," I said. "Probably Benedict, Gérard, Random, Corwin . . ."

"Benedict has the mark of doom upon him, Gérard possesses the will but not the wit, Random lacks courage and determination. Corwin . . . Is he not out of favor and out of sight?"

My thoughts returned to our last meeting, when he had helped me to escape from my cell to Cabra. It occurred to me that he might have had second thoughts concerning that, not having been aware of the circumstances which had put me there.

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"Is that why you have taken this form?" he went on. "Is this some manner of rebuke? Are you testing me again?"

"He is neither out of favor nor sight," I said, "though he has enemies among the family and elsewhere. He would attempt anything to preserve the realm. How do you see his chances?"

"Has he not been away for a long while?"

"Yes."

"Then he might have changed. I do not know."

"I believe he is changed. I know that he is willing to try."

He stared at me again, and he kept staring.

"You are not Oberon," he said at length.

"No."

"You are he whom I see before me."

"No more, no less."

"I see . . . I did not realize that you knew of this place."

"I didn't, until recently. The first time that I came here I was led by the unicorn."

His eyes widened.

"That is—very—interesting," he said. "It has been so long . . ."

"What of my question?"

"Eh? Question? Did you ask a question?"

"My chances. Do you think I might be able to repair the Pattern?"

He advanced slowly, and reaching up, placed his right hand on my shoulder.

The staff tilted in his other hand as he did so; its blue light flared within a foot of my face, but I felt no heat. He looked into my eyes.

"You have changed," he said, after a time.

"Enough," I asked, "to do the job?"

He looked away.

"Perhaps enough to make it worth trying," he said, "even if we are foredoomed to failure."

"Will you help me?"

"I do not know," he said, "that I will be able. This thing with my moods, my thoughts—it comes and it goes. Even now, I feel some of my control slipping away. The excitement, perhaps . . . We had best get back inside."

I heard a clinking noise at my back. When I turned, the griffin was there, his head swinging slowly from left to right, his tail from right to left, his tongue darting. He began to circle us, halting when he came to a position between Dworkin and the Pattern.

"He knows," Dworkin said. "He can sense it when I begin to change. He will not let me near the Pattern then. —Good Wixer. We are returning now. It is all right. —Come, Corwin."

We headed back toward the cavemouth and Wixer followed, a clink for every pace.

"The Jewel," I said, "the Jewel of Judgment . . . You say that it is necessary for the repair of the Pattern?"

"Yes," he said. "It would have to be borne the entire distance through the Pattern, reinscribing the original design in the places where it has been broken. This could only be done by one who is attuned to the Jewel, though."

"I am attuned to the Jewel," I said.

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"How did you manage that?" he asked, halting.

Wixer made a cackling noise behind us, and we resumed walking.

"I followed your written instructions—and Eric's verbal ones," I said. "I took it with me to the center of the Pattern and projected myself through it."

"I see," he said. "How did you obtain it?"

"Eric gave it to me, on his deathbed."

We entered the cave.

"You have it now?"

"I was forced to cache it in a place off in Shadow."

"I would suggest you retrieve it quickly and bring it here or take it back to the palace. It is best kept near the center of things."

"Why is that?"

"It tends to have a distorting effect on shadows if it lies too long among them."

"Distorting? In what fashion?"

"There is no way to tell, in advance. It depends entirely upon the locale."

We rounded a corner, continued on back through the gloom.

"What does it mean," I said, "when you are wearing the Jewel and everything begins to slow down about you? Fiona warned me that this was dangerous, but she was not certain why."

"It means that you have reached the bounds of your own existence, that your energies will shortly be exhausted, that you will die unless you do something quickly."

"What is that?"

"Begin to draw power from the Pattern itself—the primal Pattern

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within the Jewel."

"How is this achieved?"

"You must surrender to it, release yourself, blot out your identity, erase the bounds which separate you from everything else."

"It sounds easier said than done."

"But it can be done, and it is the only way."

I shook my head. We moved on, coming at last to the big door. Dworkin extinguished the staff and leaned it against the wall. We entered and he secured the door. Wixer had stationed himself just outside.

"You will have to leave now," Dworkin said.

"But there are many more things that I must ask you, and some that I would like to tell you."

"My thoughts grow meaningless, and your words would be wasted. Tomorrow night, or the next, or the next. Hurry! Go!"

"Why the rush?"

"I may harm you when the change comes over me. I am holding it back by main will now. Depart!"

"I do not know how. I know how to get here, but—"

"There are all manner of special Trumps in the desk in the next room. Take the light! Go anywhere! Get out of here!"

I was about to protest that I hardly feared any physical violence he could muster, when his features began to flow like melting wax and he somehow seemed much larger and longer-limbed than he had been. Seizing the light, I fled the room, a sudden chill upon me.

. . . . To the desk. I tore open the drawer and snatched at some Trumps which lay scattered within it. I heard footsteps then, of something entering the room behind me, coming from the chamber I had just departed. They did not seem like the footsteps of a man. I did not look back. Instead, I raised the cards before me and regarded the one on top. It was an unfamiliar scene, but I opened my mind immediately and reached for it. A mountain crag, something indistinct beyond it, a strangely stippled sky, a scattering of stars to the left . . . The card was alternately hot and cold to my touch, and a heavy wind seemed to come blowing through it as I stared, somehow rearranging the prospect.

From right behind me then, the heavily altered but still recognizable voice of Dworkin spoke: "Fool! You have chosen the land of your doom!"

A great claw-like hand—black, leathery, gnarled—reached over my shoulder, as if to snatch the card away. But the vision seemed ready, and I rushed forward into it, turning the card from me as soon as I realized I had made my escape. Then I halted and stood stock-still, to let my senses adjust to the new locale.

I knew. From snatches of legend, bits of family gossip and from a general feeling which came over me, I knew the place to which I had come. It was with full certainty as to identity that I raised my eyes to look upon the Courts of Chaos.

TO BE CONTINUED

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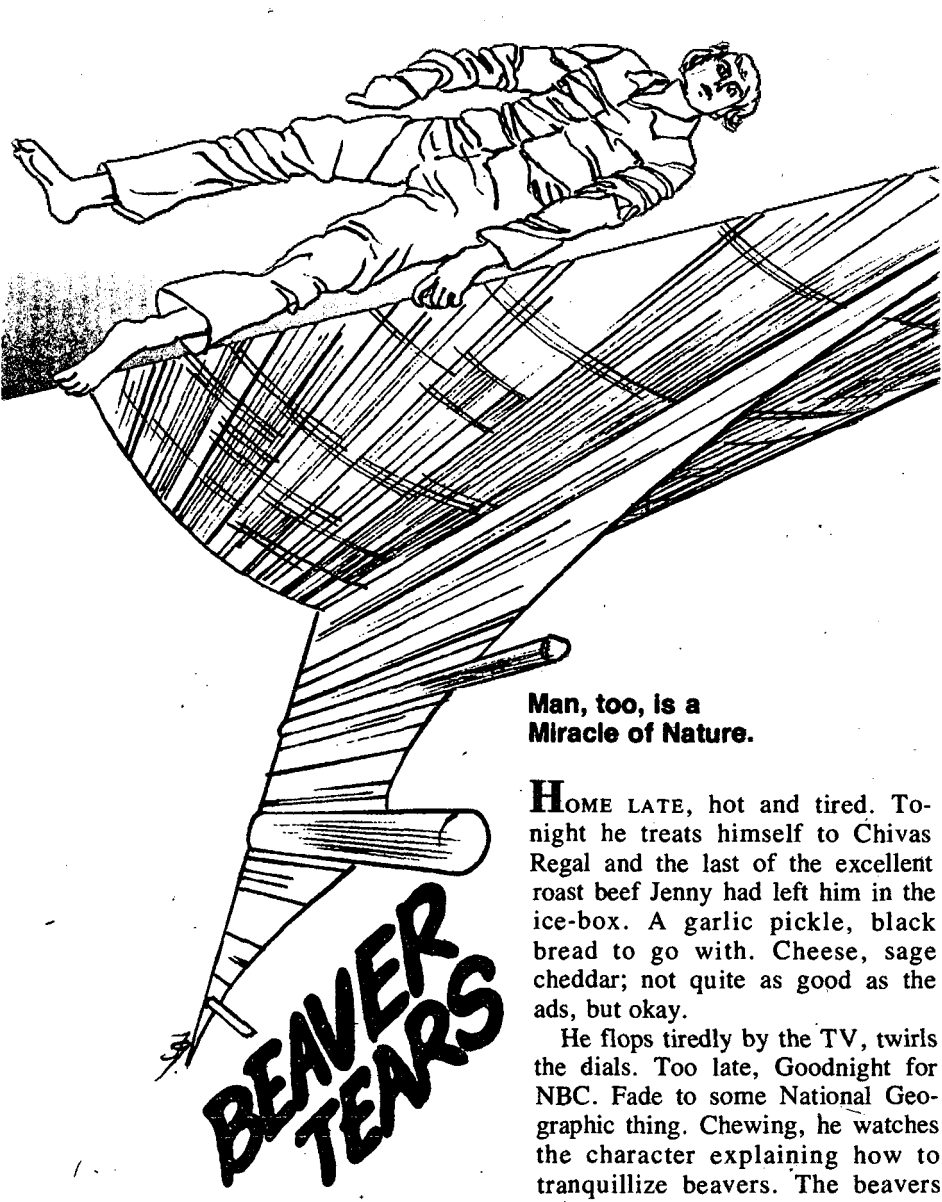

BEAVER TEARS

Raccoona Sheldon

Man, too, is a Miracle of Nature.

HOME LATE, hot and tired. Tonight he treats himself to Chivas Regal and the last of the excellent roast beef Jenny had left him in the ice-box. A garlic pickle, black bread to go with. Cheese, sage cheddar; not quite as good as the ads, but okay.

He flops tiredly by the TV, twirls the dials. Too late, Goodnight for NBC. Fade to some National Geographic thing. Chewing, he watches the character explaining how to tranquillize beavers. The beavers look toothy, inscrutable. Marlborough music. Men are putting the beavers in bags, the bags in baskets on a pack-horse. Beavers

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are ecological. He gathers they are being taken up a strip-mined mountain to be released. There they will start right in doing their beaver thing, making dams, catching silt, rebuilding the forests. Very neat; miracles of nature.

He has another Chivas Regal, wondering if the beavers in the bags like each other. When the man turns them loose they hump off wildly in different directions. A couple act damaged but the camera pans quickly to an okay beaver disappearing up a dry gulch, synchronised with Disney music. Next week, Spearing the Giant Manta.

He kills the commercial and wanders out onto the dark patio. Still hot. Lights all around now. This was all woodland when he and Jenny came out five years ago. Supposed to be five-acre zoning, but the commission ran in a sewer-line and changed that.

He studies what can be seen of the sky above the lights. Summer storm building up over Bald Peak, west of town. Big sheet flash. A loud blare of amped-up C&W is coming from the Bannerman's patio, another of their interminable parties. "Bashes," Joan Bannerman calls them, grinning with post-menopausal gaiety. The Bannermans have two oafish teen-age sons. Joan dresses like their sister. Prides herself on her figure. Riding behind them on their Harley-Davidsons to the postoffice, for god's sake. Wagon wheels and cow skulls around their big swimming pool.

He sighs, appreciating Jenny, even appreciating the baby at this distance. No, that isn't fair, he's a good little guy. In two more days she'll be back, Jenny and Jimmy . . . He grunts uxoriously, scratching his arse on the redwood table. Two more nights. To Grandmother's house we go. Only why the hell Grandmother lives in Santa Barbara. Good thing overall, though. Feeling mellow now he whistles softly at an awakened mockingbird that is answering the Bannerman stampede.

There's one dark patch of woods left, around the Jacksons' house. Last black family left out here. Ex-farmland. They own their land. Probably sell out soon. Nice neighbors; six kids, no noise at all. Doubtless being kept awake by middle-class honky uproar.

A massive flickering over Bald Peak now, quite a display. Jenny says there's no such thing as "summer" lightning, merely a storm somewhere else. If so it's a good one, maybe it'll bring rain. We need it; water table is way down, wells going dry since they've paved half the county. Should get the weather forecast, he thinks, and on impulse goes back in and flips on the radio weather station. On the fritz again, nothing but squeals. Without Jenny everything goes to hell fast.

He spins to a news channel, gets

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some kind of science-fiction late show, more static. Jenny will fix it. Two more nights. Should he finish up the whiskey?

He decides against it; heavy day tomorrow. Thursday always the worst of the week, never ask anybody for anything on Thursdays. The Bannerman bedlam seems to be increasing. Shrieks and loud male bellowing through the PA. Goddam it, outdoor PA systems are illegal now, one good thing. Should he go over there and remonstrate? No, wait for Jenny, she does that kind of thing better. Especially if it wakes up the baby.

He grins lonesomely, closing windows on the Bannerman side. Thank god it's cooling off, but the air really stinks. Gassy. Imagine smog out here, he thinks disgustedly, sliding shut the patio doors. The last thing he remembers is a sudden stillness from the Bannerman patio . . .

* * *

. . . A mean slick hardness under his cheek. He rejects it, wills it to become smooth bed sheets. Too hard—a floor, say the patio tiles. Please god, let it be tiles, let it be a coronary even. I hurt. It's a minor coronary, that's all.

But the pain isn't in his chest, it's in his leg. His arm, too. And oh yes, the jaw, which he has tried imperceptibly to move. Very bad; he decides against trying to move anything else, lies with his eyes shut. *I did fight—*

He abolishes thought, tries to wrap unconsciousness around him. But the drug, gas, whatever, is wearing thin. The horrible slick floor under his face has begun to hum, buzzes through his bones like an angry insect. *I did fight—*

And at that moment he sees it all again, the awful view from the conveyor or whatever it was, when he had waked to find himself sprawled on metal mesh which was carrying him higher and higher above the early dawn countryside. High-pitched whine of machinery . . . He remembers blurrily raising his head, seeing the dim lumps of other bodies ascending behind him. And then as the thing stopped two or three hundred feet up in nowhere, he had turned and seen the cliff of metal alongside. The dark cliff, the darker gaping port, and THEM. Coming for him, reaching with *things—*

In that instant he realized with total lucidity that he was here while Jenny and his child were in California two thousand miles away; he will never conceivably see either of them again if he does not act. He leaps, throws himself hurtfully across alien machinery, trying to scramble away, slide down—if necessary fall down—anything not to be taken by THEM, into THAT—but it's too late, things have seized and coiled around him as he struggles. He flails, kicks and

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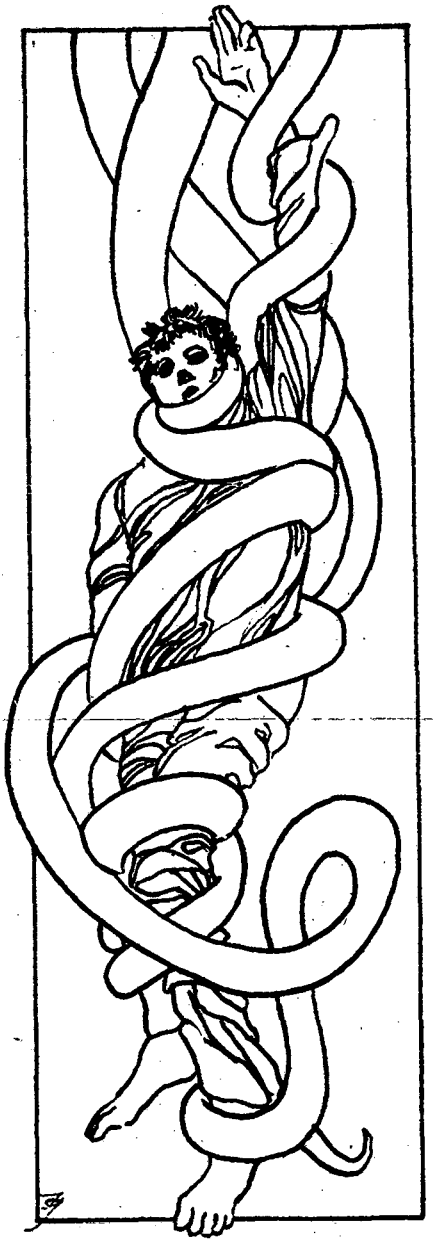
bites metal until the nauseating fog blotted his world.

Yes, I fought, he forms now with his lips on hardness, refusing to open his eyes, to admit any of this. But he cannot shut out the humming, and above it the susurrus of other breathing around him. Something or somebody is making a high thin rasping sound, *Ekkk-hnhnhn, Ek-kkk-hhhn,* like a delirious chicken.

The drumming under his head is louder, is making his jaw hurt intolerably. Teeth are broken from grinding on metal or moving metallic flesh. He has a searing memory of sentient coils against his body and vomit suddenly shoots up his throat, literally jumps against his teeth. Projectile vomiting, he remembers this is called. Without moving he lets it trickle out, re-tasting decomposed whiskey.

Against his will, vision has penetrated between the lashes of his good eye. A dim grey light, which seems to be coming from the slickness of the floor. In his line of sight is a bare tanned ankle. Involuntarily he follows the young line of the leg in faded jeans. Beyond the jeans is a mauve t-shirt, a heavy mane of reddish gold hair. It is not Jenny. The girl is lying face down, breathing okay. The rasping whine is coming from beyond her.

Very slowly he lets his eyes open. He can see a corner of the cell or compartment. The wall is shiny like the floor. A cargo-space.



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The ship probably is full of them.

Crouched against the wall in a curious squatting posture is a woman. In the dim under-lighting her face looks like a frog. Then he recognises her: Joan Bannerman. She is making the gasping.

After a moment he realises that there is another figure in the far corner of his field of vision. By squinting over his shoulder, not moving his head, he can see a face down by the floor. It is looking at Joan Bannerman, a round brown face, screwed into a toothy rigid mask. A memory from another world flicks him; the beavers on TV. But this is not a beaver, it is a human child. Finally he remembers. She is Evelyn, or Jacqueline, one of the Jacksons' kids. About eight. She is clutching her arm, which seems to have bled heavily. He will have to face reality now, he knows; he must move, get up, help the child.

But as he thinks this a huge clanging rush of sound rocks the chamber, almost tears him loose from consciousness. Pain rips through him, while in the deeps of his heart a shutter closes forever on a world of green and sunlight. The ship is taking off. *Jenny, Jimmy.* Gone, lock it away. Bite down.

Dizzy, trying not to vomit again, he thinks, we did it. Whatever it was, we did our human thing. We fixed it the way they liked. Concrete, carbon monoxide, the sea full of plastic and oil, who knows. What we do. It's fixed up for them. So now they're moving some of us along to start fixing up another. Hundreds, maybe thousands of us. Beavers. A batch per so many zillion square miles, per planet even, who knows?

With that the drug or anaesthetic wears completely away and the pain from his thigh and his broken face becomes unbearable. His leg must be splintered, really he needs medical care. A groan escapes him. He tries to turn sidewise, wondering if Joan Bannerman can help him, or maybe the strange girl on the floor.

Joan Bannerman is staring blindly, muttering "Harry, Harry," with her fingers in her mouth. No help there. The girl?

The girl is moving now, he sees, waking up. Apparently not hurt. She rolls over with luxurious sleepy ease and farts loudly.

"Mom?"

Oh god, it is not a girl at all. It is Oscar Bannerman.

"Mom!" Oscar repeats querulously. His mother does not react. Suddenly a hand comes from nowhere and slaps her on the face. Jesus—there's another youth here, squatting by the wall beyond Joan. It's not her other son, it's that friend of theirs who shot the cat. Billy Dee something.

Joan Bannerman comes jerkily to life and starts patting her youngest, still crooning "Harry . . ."

"Okay, Mom." Oscar shrugs off her hand. He and Billy Dee get

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groggily up on their feet, staring around. Their eyes are not empathic.

Beneath the pain a deathly hysteria is rising in him. The aliens, he thinks, do not seem to know much about human biology. Or they don't care. Maybe they use some easy mark like hair, maybe they thought Oscar was a female . . . One prepubescent and one wombless female, to colonise what? Their ecological operations must be on such a large scale that little slip-ups like this don't matter. We dump millions of trout from planes, some of them live.

"You okay, Ossie?" Billy Dee inquires.

Oscar farts again, giggles. Billy Dee nods in approval, his small, slightly crossed eyes roving between the black child and the wounded man on the floor, himself.

No one says anything. In the silence rise faint clangors of alien might. The little Jackson girl has her flat terrified stare fixed on Billy Dee. And now another, final presence is perceptible behind her in the dim cell.

Please god, he thinks, let it be someone okay. Painfully he twists his head to see.

It is her thirteen-year-old brother Payton, a lithe black youth crouched death-still with a glinting object in one hand.

No. Letting himself sink down through pain's claws, he decides this is not going to be one of the successful ones. ★

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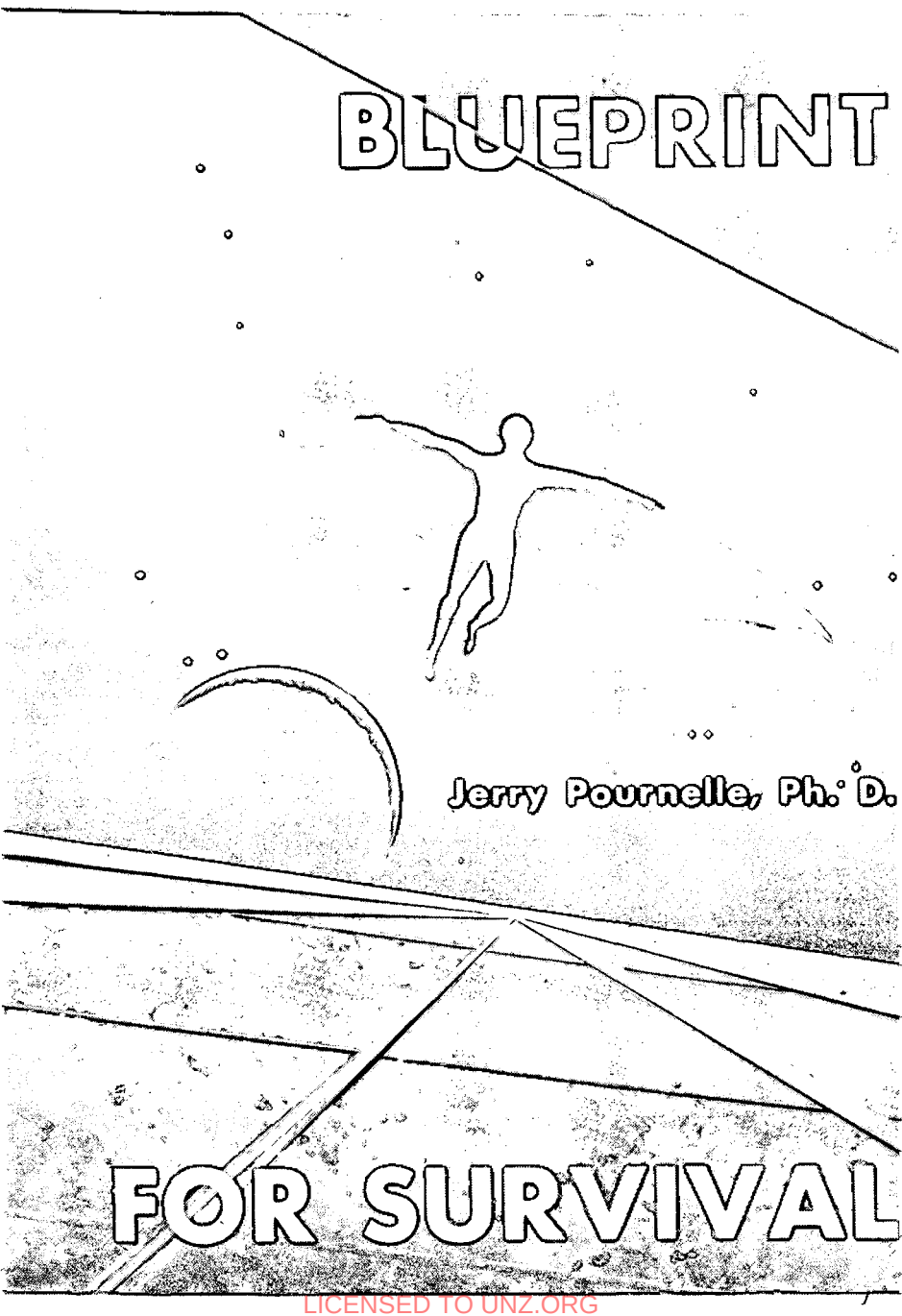

Jerry Pournelle, Ph. D.

FOR SURVIVAL

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A STEP FARTHER OUT

THIS MAY BE A UNIQUE CENTURY in many ways. In one respect it certainly is: this is the first time that mankind has had the resources to leave Earth and make his home in the solar system. No one doubts that we can do it. It takes only determination and investment.

Alas, we may be unique in another way: ours may be the only century in all of history when mankind can break free of Earth. Our opportunity may not come again, *per omnia secula seculorum*. Thus it could be that we have it in our power to condemn our descendants to imprisonment forever.

Last month I wrote about Survival with Style: how we can, if we will, usher in the Third Industrial Revolution through exploitation of space, and thereby supply Earth with non-polluting energy and metals for millennia. One reader commented as follows: "I remain skeptical. By the time man is forced to accept population control, the world is going to be in a sadder state than it is now. And I doubt if nations will give up their armaments and their free school lunches in order to get the resources to mine the asteroids until the situation is so bad that we probably can't mine the asteroids in time to save us."

Unfortunately he may be right. There is no end to forseeable crises, and enough of them could so deplete our resource base and technological ability that when we realize that we *must* go to space, we won't be able to get there. Furthermore, anti-technological sentiments are no joke; a great number of influential intellectuals have embraced Zero-Growth, condemn technology, and seem to want the next generation to atone for the sins of our forefathers. They do not appear to want themselves to atone; I haven't seen many leading intellectuals giving up their own luxuries, much less necessities, in order to make amends for the "rape of the Earth", "eco-doom", or the rest of what engineers and technologists are accused of. *We* shall continue to enjoy; but after us, The Deluge. Our children shall pay.

And of course if Zero-Growth has

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its way, our children *will* pay; but ours won't pay as much as the children of the people in the developing countries. Those kids are doomed with no chance at all.

Do not misunderstand. Were Earth our only source of energy and resources I should probably myself be crying Doom. As it is I fully support many conservation measures—and in fact I was writing pro-conservation articles as early as 1957. I've no use for wasters of Earth's bounty. But I've less use for those who would condemn most of the world to eternal poverty when we can do something about it.

Incidentally, the Club of Rome, which sponsored the original computer studies leading to *The Limits To Growth* and provides much of the intellectual fuel for Zero-Growth, has sponsored a second report entitled *Mankind At The Turning Point* (MATTP). This book, unlike *Limits*, is supposed to hold out some hope for the poor. By looking at the world as a set of 10 "regions" we can, say the authors of MATTP, divide the wealth and sustain what they call "balanced growth".

Unfortunately they never tell us how. As one reviewer put it, "I do not find any clear explanation of the ways in which balancing out the regions of the world would lead to any lessening of the total demands of human civilization on the planet's living-space, resources, and vital eco-systems." (Frank Hopkins, in the October, 1975 *Futurist*.) Moreover, the MATTP plan demands foreign aid at the rate of some $500 billion *a year* at the end of a 50 year development period. True, there are plans with less massive foreign aid donations; but all are truly enormous, and like Zero-Growth must be started *now* or we are all doomed.

And this is nonsense. No politician is going to run for office on a platform of international bounty. No democratic—or communist—nation is going to shell out limited wealth at that rate. And even if, by some miracle, the western nations were to divvy up with everyone else, the Second Report can't challenge one feature of *The Limits To Growth:* no matter how wildly successful we are in imposing Zero-Growth and population control, in 400 years the game will be over. We will have run out of non-renewable resources. Mankind will be forced to give up high-energy civilization and return to some kind of pastoral society.

Surely this is not a desirable goal? There may be those who dream of the simple life (and a lesser number who will actually choose to live it), but surely only a madman would impose it on everyone else without dire necessity? If there is any alternative, must we not take it?

* * *

There are alternatives. They

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aren't even very expensive compared to the MATTP plan. Take, for example, the detailed plans of Princeton professor Gerard K. O'Neill.

Deatils of what have come to be called "O'Neill Colonies" were first widely published in the Sept. 1974 issue of *Physics Today*. The plan has been modified somewhat since that time, most recently by a week-long NASA-sponsored conference of some of the biggest names in space exploration, but the basic concept remains the same: building self-sustaining colonies in space. O'Neill colonies have a major advantage: they are not only self-sustaining, but will be capable of building *more* colonies without further investment from Earth. When the first ones have been completed, Earth need pay no more. In addition, the colonies will be able to make important contributions to Earth's economy.

There's been a great deal of excitement in the science community, and of course among science fiction fans, although oddly enough most SF writers haven't put much about O'Neill colonies into print. In my own case I assumed others would, and I was waiting for new details. Even so, much of the SF community is aware of the O'Neill concept. "Life in Space" is now a regular program item at science fiction conventions, and will be a major topic of one of the panels I'm chairing at the next Labor Day's World SF Convention.

(For convention details, write MIDAMERICON, Box 221, Kansas City, MO, 64141.)

The basic O'Neill plan is for colonies able to support from 10 to 50 thousand people each. They will be located in the L4 and L5 points of the Earth-Moon system. Since not all readers know what that means, and the location is important to the economics of the project, let me take a moment to explain Trojan Points.

The equations of gravitational attraction are so complex that we can't really predict where planets, satellites, moons, etc., will be after long periods of time. Given high-speed computers we can make approximations, but we can't precisely solve problems involving three or more bodies except in special cases. A long time ago LaGrange discovered one of those special cases, namely, that when a system consists of three objects, one extremely large with respect to the rest, and a third very small with respect to the other two, there are five points of stability: that is, things that get to those points tend to stay there. These are often called "LaGrangian Points" and designated as L1, L2, . . . , L5. They are illustrated in Figure One.

Three of the five are not really stable: that is, if an object is perturbed out of L1, L2, or L3, it won't tend to return. The other two, L4 and L5, are dynamically stable:

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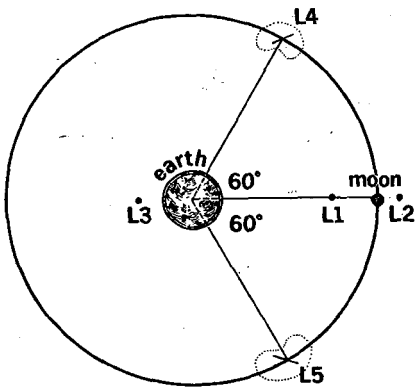

left to themselves things put there will stay forever.

Points L4 and L5 are named *Trojan Points* because in the Sol-Jupiter system these points are occupied by a number of asteroids named after Trojan War heroes. The Trojans trail Jupiter, while the Greeks lead. Unfortunately the custom of naming the Eastern group for Greeks and the Western for Trojans wasn't established before one asteroid in each cluster was named for the wrong class of hero; thus there's a Trojan spy in the Greek camp, and vice-versa.

Because of perturbing influences of other planets Trojan Points aren't really "points"; the Trojan asteroids drift around within a sausage-shaped area about one AU (93,000,000 miles) in diameter, while objects in the Earth-Moon Trojan points would tend to drift a few thousand miles one way or another. No matter; they're stable enough. Colonies and supplies, once they arrive at L4 or L5, won't go anywhere. The points are, of course, 240,000 miles from Earth and an equal distance from the Moon.

O'Neill colonies will be big. Even the first model, which is intended as an assembly base and factory, will be several kilometers in diameter. Later models will be larger. One design calls for a cylinder 6 kilometers in diameter and several times that in length, with "windows" running lengthwise to let in sunlight, large mirrors outside to focus more sunlight, and everything from farms and houses to trout streams in the "land" areas under the windows. The cylinders slowly rotate to provide artificial gravity. The exact gravity wanted isn't known yet, but it will certainly be less than that of Earth, possibly low enough that man-powered flight (yes, I mean people with artificial wings) will be not only feasible, but the usual means of personal transportation. As O'Neill points out, a great number of energy-consuming activities required for civilization on Earth can be greatly simplified in the colonies.

It's possible to wax poetic about

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the idyllic life in O'Neill colonies, but I won't do that. In the first place, I may be far-out technologically, but I don't think people are likely to live in Utopian style no matter how pleasant their environment. The important point is that life can be pleasant, and certainly possible, in space colonies.

These colonies are to be self-sufficient: they have more than enough agricultural area to feed their inhabitants. They are self-generating, with a duplication time of under ten years; over the long haul they could be built fast enough to accomodate some of Earth's surplus population. That, however, is not a major selling point, and we'll ignore it here.

Most importantly for our purposes the O'Neill colonies can sell power to Earth. It is perfectly feasible to collect solar radiation, convert it to electricity, and beam the juice down to Earth by micro-wave. Tests show that the cycle, from DC to DC, is about 65% efficient—and of course most of the wasted energy doesn't get to Earth in the first place. There are a number of designs for the Earth-based receivers. The one I like best is a grid of wires several meters above ground; energy densities underneath are low enough to let cattle graze in the pastures below the grid.

All this sounds lovely, but surely it's a bit far-fetched? No. O'Neill colonies use present technology. There are no super-strong materials and no magic systems. We could now begin building an O'Neill colony this year, occupy it in 1990, and by the year 2000 have a couple more of them built. In which case we could also be supplying about as much power to Earth as the Alaskan pipeline will. In 20 more years space could supply nearly all US electric power.*

So why don't we do it?

It's bloody expensive, that's why. Make no mistake: this would be a costly undertaking, on a level of effort compared to the Interstate Highway System, or the Viet Nam War. It would not, in my judgement, be nearly so expensive as Zero-Growth, but unfortunately the costs of space colonies are *visible*. They're direct expenditures. The costs of Zero-Growth are hidden, since the most costly part is in potential not used and goods not created.

In the December 5, 1975 *Science* (the prestigious publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science) Dr. O'Neill presents an economic analysis of satellite solar power stations (SSPS's) and Space Manufacturing Facilities. He comes up with total costs ranging from a low of $31 billion—about the proportion of

*Readers with more interest in O'Neill colonies might write the L5 Society, 1620 N. Park, Tucson AZ 85719. L5 publishes a newsletter and lobbies for NASA support for space colonies. Dues of the L5 Society are $20 annually.

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GNP that Apollo cost—to a high of $185 billion. He also discusses benefits from the electric power produced by SSPS's, and concludes that over a 40 year period the facilities would show actual profits from sales of power alone.

As a co-discoverer (with Poul Anderson) of what was once known in the aerospace industry as Pournelle's Law of Costs and Schedules ("Everything takes longer and costs more."), I tend to distrust Dr. O'Neill's numbers. It hardly makes any difference. The important point is that the program is feasible. We could afford it. Take a worst-case. Suppose it takes 25 years, and the total cost is 50 Apollo programs, that is, a round one trillion bucks. The money must be spent at $40 billion a year for the next 25 years, which comes to $200 a year for every man, woman, and child in the US. In my own family it would be about $1000 a year.

That's a lot of money. Worth it, I think; the benefits are literally incalculable. For example, by the year 2000 the US will need 2 billion tons of coal annually simply to operate our electric power system. Nuclear power plants could reduce that substantially, but the nuclear industry is in deep—not technological—trouble. It would be worth a lot to me simply to avoid the strip mines that 2 billion tons a year will require.

Moreover, the space budget isn't going to be simply tacked onto the national budget. All of the money will be spent here on Earth—people living in Lunar and space colonies have no need for Earth dollars, and what they physically import is tiny compared to the salaries that will be paid to Earth workers manufacturing products for the colony program. With $40 billion a year in high-technology industries, we can eliminate a number of "pump-priming" expenditures and dismantle several welfare and unemployment compensation schemes as well.

Of course we won't really need to spend that kind of money, and I suspect we can start getting returns on that investment before 25 years. O'Neill himself thinks in terms of some $5 billion a year, which works out to $25 a head for each person in the US; and the colonies have got to be worth *that* if only in entertainment value.

Now how can something as complex as space colonies be built for that low a price? And wouldn't it be cheaper to build space manufacturing facilities in near-Earth orbit rather than going out to L5?

That's the beauty of the O'Neill concept. All the building materials for the colonies must, of course, be put into orbit—but it need not come from Earth. Most of the raw materials for the L5 colony will come from the Moon.

The Moon has one twentieth the gravity well that Earth does. The colonies will be in stable Trojan

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Points. Put those two data together and you reach an interesting conclusion: much of the mass of the colonies need never have been launched by rockets at all.

There are several devices for getting lunar materials to the L5 point. One involves a simple centrifugal arm: a big solar-powered gizmo similar to the thing used to pitch baseballs for batting practice. It flings gup, such as unrefined Lunar ore (25-35% metal, from our random samples) out to the L5 point, and the laws of gravity keep it there. Refining takes place at the colony, and the slag is useful as dirt, cosmic ray shielding, and just plain mass. There's also oxygen in them there rocks.

Another workable device is the linear accelerator—a long electric sled as used in countless science fiction stories. Both these can be built with present technology.

Obviously, then, O'Neill colonies have a pre-requisite, namely, a permanent Lunar Colony. Now that's certainly within present-day technology; I once did studies that demonstrated that with technology available in the 60's we could keep astronauts and scientists alive for years on the Lunar surface, and things have come a long way since then.

The Lunar Colony will need at least one near-Earth manned space station, since Earth-orbit to Lunar-orbit is the most efficient way to transport large masses of materials from here to there. The Lunar Shuttle will be assembled in space, and won't have all that waste structure that would enable it to withstand planetary gravity; thus it can carry far more payload per trip.

It's here that I think the profits come in. SKYLAB demonstrated that space manufacturing operations have fantastic potential profits. There are things we can make in space that simply cannot be made on Earth. Materials research benefits alone might pay for the space station. Certainly the potential for Earth-watch operations, pollution monitoring, better weather prediction, increased communications, and all the other benefits we've already got from space, will contribute to profits as well.

And once space shows a visible return on investment, we may well be on our way.

So. The pre-requisite for the space station is the Shuttle; and there's the weak point. The Shuttle is in trouble. There are a number of Congresscritters who'd like nothing better than to convert the Shuttle into benefits for their own districts. There are plenty of intellectuals who continually do cry "Why must we waste money in space when there are so many needs on Earth?" The obvious reply, that most of our expenditures on Earth seem to have vanished with no visible benefit, while our space program has already just about paid for itself in better weather prediction alone,

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does not impress these gentlemen.

There are also the Zero-Growth theorists who see investment in space not as a mere waste of money, but as a positive evil.

We are close to breakthrough. For a whack of a lot less than we spend on liquor, or on cigarettes and cosmetics, on new highways we don't need, on countless tiny drains that fritter away the hopes of mankind, the United States alone could break out of Earth's prison and send men to space. The effect on future generations is literally incalculable. We *can* do it; but will we?

* * *

I wish I were sure that we would; or that if we of the US don't do it, somebody else will; but I am not. There are just too many disaster scenarios. A Great Depression. War. The triumph of anti-technological ideology. The continued ruin of our educational system—in California, with 30 State Universities, there is not one in which bonehead English is not the largest single class, and the retreat from excellence (called democratization and equality of opportunity) races onward. Any of these, or all of them at once, could throw away an opportunity that may never again come to mankind.

So what can we do?

For one thing, we can organize at least as well as the opposition. Science fiction readers may have mixed emotions about "ecology" movements, consumerism, Zero-Growth, and the like, but I think we have not lost our sense of wonder, nor abandoned our hopes. We have not given up the vision of man's vast future among the stars. We have not traded the future of man for a few luxuries in our time.

Unfortunately, we have no voice, or rather, we have a myriad of voices, none very effective. *That* at least we can remedy. There is a blanket organization whose goals I think most of us can accept, and I urge all of you to consider joining it. It is called the National Space Institute, (NSI). Its president is Werner von Braun and the Directors are professionals. Its purpose is to keep the faith; to keep alive the technology we need, to feed the dream, and ceaselessly to tell public officials just how important space is to all of us.

NSI dues are $15 a year, $9 for students. You may join by sending the money to National Space Institute, 1911 N. Fort Myer Drive, Suite 408, Arlington, VA 22209. Dues and other contributions are tax deductible. It has publications and such like, but that's not the reason to join. NSI's real benefit to members is as spokesman for our dreams.

In the 50's a number of us in the aircraft industry used to bootleg space research. There wasn't any budget for that crazy Buck Rogers stuff. Most of us believed we would

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see the day when the first man set foot on the Moon. We didn't believe we'd see the last one. I hope we haven't.

Like many of us who recall pre-sputnik days, I alternate between hope and depression. Recently I have seen one hopeful sign, although it is a bit frightening.

As I write this it appears that the Soviets have built lasers sufficiently powerful to blind our infra-red observation satellites. These satellites are in very high orbits, meaning that the Soviet lasers must be extremely powerful. One old friend who has remained in the industry told me at a New Year's party that the Soviets must be at least 5 years ahead of us, and this in a field in which we thought we were supreme.

Why is this hopeful? Isn't it rather frightening?

It's frightening if you think the Soviet Union may fall or be under the control of convinced ideologists willing to trade part of their country for all of the world. There is nothing in Marxist ideology to forbid that—indeed, any communist who has the opportunity to eliminate the West and thus bring about the world revolution, and who fails to do it because of the price in human lives, is guilty of bourgeois sentimentality. So yes, it's frightening that the Soviets may have taken several long strides toward laser defense against ICBM's.

It's hopeful, though, in that it may stimulate us to get moving in large laser R&D. In my judgment, defense technology is the ideal way to conduct an arms race, if you must have an arms race. (And it takes only one party to start a race, unfortunately.) Defense systems don't threaten the opponent's civilian population. They merely complicate offensive operations, hopefully to the point where no sane person would launch an attack; and they give some hope that part of your own civilian population may survive if worst comes to worst.

If we can't justify space operations in terms of benefits to mankind, then perhaps we can sell them as defense systems? Big lasers can be used as space launching systems. If built they can put a good bit of material into orbit, thus making the manned space factory economically feasible and nearly inevitable; and once in Earth orbit, as I said in the first of these columns exactly two years ago,* you're halfway to anywhere.

Specifically, we'd be halfway to an era of plenty without pollution; halfway to assuring that our descendents won't curse our memory for throwing away mankind's hope for the stars. ★

*This is the second anniversary of these columns and I've greatly enjoyed doing them. No one will ever take Willy Ley's place, but I like to think he would have approved.

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HEXAPEDIA

Four legs good?
Six legs better!

BONNIE DALZELL

THE OWL-GRYPHON in this month's showcase is the graphical result of a pleasant conversation that I had with Galaxy's Esteemed Editor at a science fiction convention during the winter of 1975. Esteemed Editor Baen and I were discussing the occurence of classical mythological themes in science fiction. He suggested that the composite creatures of ancient myths might be a source of inspiration for the multiple-limbed aliens encountered so frequently in contemporary science fiction. These aliens he noted, are usually built on a basically vertebrate body plan.

I have long asserted that the only reason terrestrial vertebrates are limited to four limbs is due to their common descent from fishes adapted to an open-ocean (pelagic) way of life. Vertebrates became excellent swimmers using their tails as the organ of propulsion. An animal living in the open ocean with a rear propulsion system and a center of lift (the air bladder in bony fishes) located anteriorly needs only two sets of diving planes to control pitch and yaw. Had the ancestry of land vertebrates come from animals that had always been dwellers on the bottom, especially in the nearshore or fresh-water environments, we might well be hexa-, or more podal.

Indeed, there once were fishes in the vertebrate pedigree with as many as ten sets of paired appendages: Figure One shows a Euthacanthus, a Devonian form with seven sets of paired fins. (Euthacanthus was one of the early

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jawed-fishes called Acanthodians that flourished during the early half of the Paleozoic.)

Increased swimming efficiency as a cause for the reduction of the paired-fin count of modern fishes to the standard two sets is, I think, far superior to the claim (too often seen in sf-related articles) that a six-limbed vertebrate would encounter impossible problems of coordination. Note that some insects coordinate—with little noticeable trouble to their rudimentary nervous systems—six limbs, four wings and many mouth parts.

But while the efficiency argument may be a valid *explanation* of the general four-limbed vertebrate form, it does not, as it were, insist upon it.

I would expect six-limbed vertebrates to evolve in an alternate planetary environment in which there was little open ocean, and in which fishes were bottom-dwelling forms commonly found in near-shore and fresh-water environments. Perhaps the planet would also be highly seasonal, with massive periodical evaporation of shallow oceans so that few fishes would evolve into highly efficient swimmers—because the open ocean would not exist for a large enough portion of the year to make it a profitable niche to occupy. In these conditions we might well expect to see the evolution of hexapedal land vertebrates. Figure Two

Once our land-dwelling vertebrate hexapods were well established we might also expect to see a phenomenon not uncommon even among quadruped vertebrates (i.e., many reptiles, birds, and some mammals, such as yourselves); the specialization of the front set of limbs for purposes other than ground locomotion.

In fact this evolutionary step would be much simpler for the hexapod; it would not have to evolve bipedal locomotion at the same time. Bipedalism requires a high degree of hind-leg engineering sophistication in the four-limbed form. (Compare the relative success of birds, which evolved bipedally first and then learned to fly, with bats, which never did acquire the trick of getting about on two legs.)

And since converting from quadrupedal to bipedal locomotion requires a much greater degree of anatomical and neural reorganization than would be the case in going from six legs to four, we would expect to see many more cases of limb specialization in our hexapodal world. One animal could modify its middle set into wings (as in this month's Showcase) and still have two sets left for running. Another could modify its front set for manipulation and carrying—the first step toward tool use—and still remain a fine runner. Indeed, the centauroid form would probably be ubiquitous.

A side issue: current theory has it that tool use *accompanies* or

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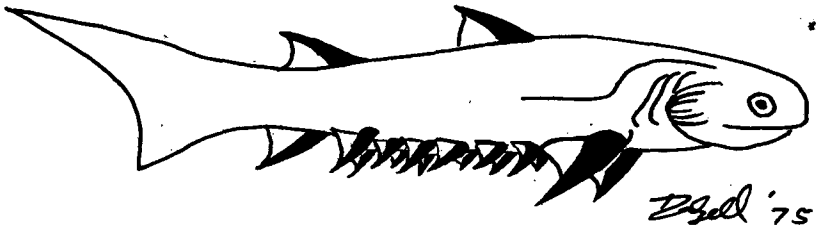

Figure One

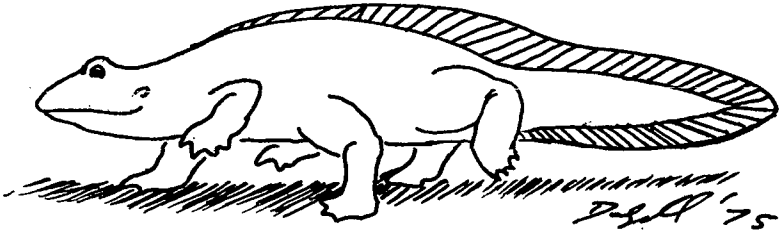

Figure Two

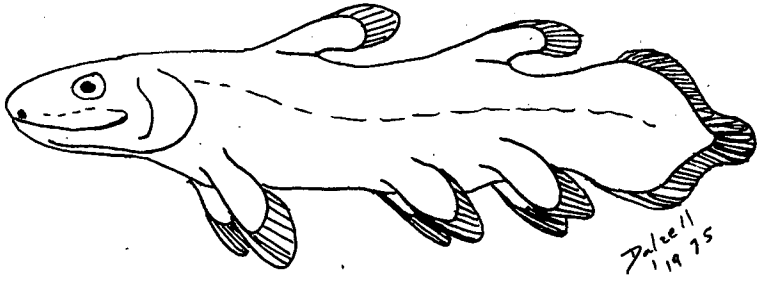

Figure Three

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perhaps even preceeds rather than follows the evolution of high intelligence; this leads to speculations concerning the possibility of many intelligent species evolving simultaneously, as well as the possibility of intelligence evolving during an earlier period than it did on earth. But, again, a full discussion of this problem lies beyond the scope of this article. Perhaps I will have an opportunity to consider it at some future date. Hint, hint.

"Fascinating," remarked Esteemed Editor, breaking into my sixth non-stop paragraph (I wax somewhat enthusiastic on the subject of alternate lines of evolution. "That is why I would like to see an illustration of a gryphon stooping after prey with the proper number of limbs. A gryphon is, after all, six-limbed and it should, for the sake of consistency, be hunting a six-limbed creature."

In such ways are works of art inspired.

After the production of the illustration I began to ponder the frequency with which six-limbed beasts and beings occur in religious and mythical motifs. The predominance of six-limbed forms is seen in legends and writings from the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Amongst the beasts are: gryphons, hyppogryphs, the southern European dragon (the oriental dragon is wingless, as are many of the dragons of northern European legend), the winged bulls and lions of Assyria, Pegasus, Greek sphinxes, and centaurs.

The winged beings include many deities and the typical angels and demons of Christianity. Some have argued that the angels illustrated with long trailing robes may have had only four limbs, the robes' purpose being not to conceal the feet but the *absence* of feet. I have no hard facts with which to resolve this controversy.

It should be noted that there are mythical beings with more than six limbs: Odin's horse was eight-limbed, the Eskimos have both Quiquern (the eight-limbed hairless dog) and a ten-limbed polar bear; many hindu deities have a limb to hold each attribute (and since their attributes were prodigous in number so was the limb count); there is a nine-limbed horse in Hungarian legend, etc. However the occurence of animals and beings with limbs in excess of six is spotty and inconsistent compared to the occurence of six-limbed beings in the eastern Mediterranean.

* * *

After a sufficiency of ethyl alcohol (Rolling Rock Beer, in fact) I was gripped by a blaze of overwhelming insight. These various six-limbed mythological figures must represent a verbal heritage from primitive humans who had contact with an entire six-limbed extraterrestrial fauna! Obviously sometime

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in the Old Stone Age a group of humans were removed from Earth for exhibition in the primatoid house at Galactric Central Zoo! This was an error on the part of the extraterrestrial collectors, for the humans were far more intelligent than their social system and parasite load would indicate. After a few generations of "Terran apes" were raised in the zoo they had learned enough Intergalactic to beg for "bananas from Betelgeuse" and "peanuts from Sirius." The ability to spontaneously utilize a language, however crudely, as a tool to specifically obtain one's wants is indicative of intelligence above that of the beasts of the field. And so the highly ethical intergalactic zoologists arranged for the immediate return of the entire Terran ape colony to their planet-of-origin.

The Terrans were released somewhere in the Arabian peninsula and thence originated not only language as a tool of human existence, but also the many myths of hexapodal deities and beasts.

I have further support for this theory from my own personal experience: back in the days when I was a crazy freshman all I wanted to do was be a paleontologist and dig up dinosaurs.

I have since discovered that dinosaurs are large, and that they are usually encased in limestone or indurated sandstone—both hard rocks to crack—and that these rocks are generally located in the middle of utter barreness and desolation, and that working with a small pick to free a 15 ton block of rock from the rest of said rock is hot tiring work! I now want to be the head paleontologist and direct while my assistants dig up dinosaurs.

Anyway, the first step to becoming a paleontologist was enrollment in Paleontology 1. Amongst the collection of fossils, casts of fossils, rocks, bones, shells, and models of animals long defunct that we studied in lab was a model of a fish *ancestral to land animals*—a Rhipidistian Crossopterygian depicted in Figure Three.

Only *this* model had *three* sets of paired fins; that is, it was a hexopterygian fish (six finned).

Although many of you will argue that it was only a model and that the artist probably made some mistake in its construction, I contend that it is additional evidence that an alien intelligence has already contacted mankind. Perhaps the artist was (is?) an Alien Observer who, impoverished by an episode of purse-tightening at Galactic Central, was forced to earn his (her/its?) living off the land while in the field, so to speak, and made a perfectly natural mistake.

Lest I be accused of attempting some crass commercial profit from this theory, a regrettable tendency of late, I hereby disown any future responsibility for this idea and leave its fate to the wisdom of the masses. ★

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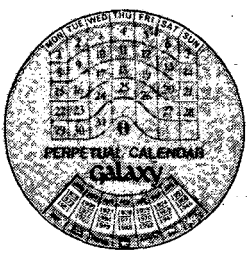

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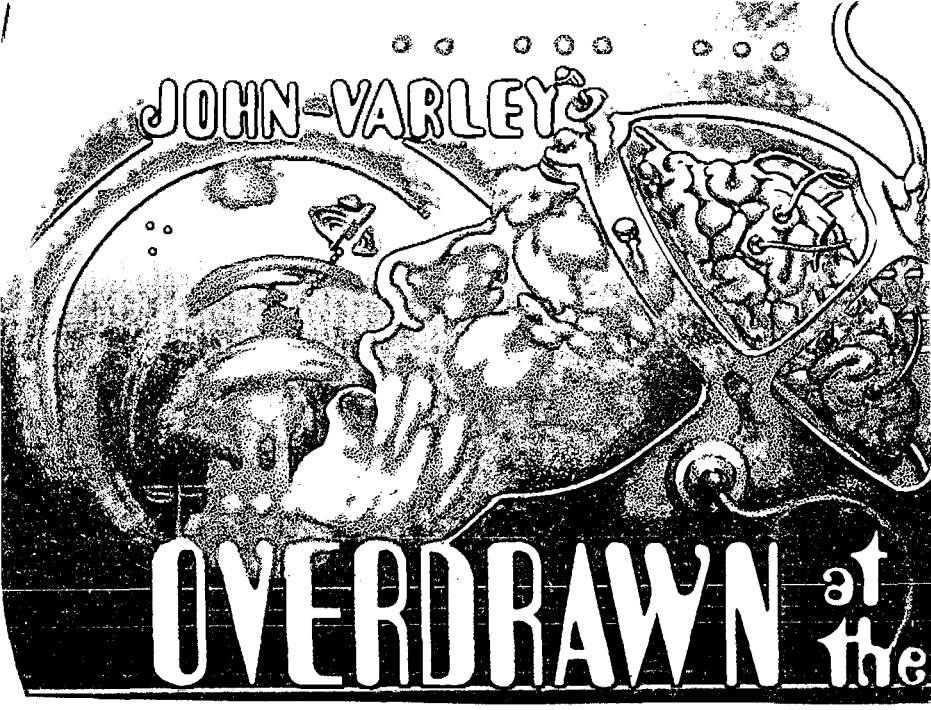

Fingal had a strong sense of identity— he was going to need it!

IT WAS SCHOOLDAY at the Kenya disneyland. Five nine-year-olds were being shown around the medico section where Fingal lay on the recording table, the top of his skull removed, looking up into a mirror. Fingal was in a bad mood (hence the trip to the disneyland) and could have done without the children. Their teacher was doing his best, but who can control five nine-year-olds?

"What's the big green wire do, teacher?" asked a little girl, reaching out one grubby hand and touching Fingal's brain where the main recording wire clamped to the built-in terminal.

"Lupus, I told you you weren't to touch anything. And look at you, you didn't wash your hands." The teacher took the child's hand and pulled it away.

"But what does it matter? You told us yesterday that the reason no one cares about dirt like they used to is dirt isn't dirty anymore."

"I'm sure I didn't tell you exactly *that*. What I said was that when humans were forced off Earth, we took the golden opportunity to wipe out all harmful germs.

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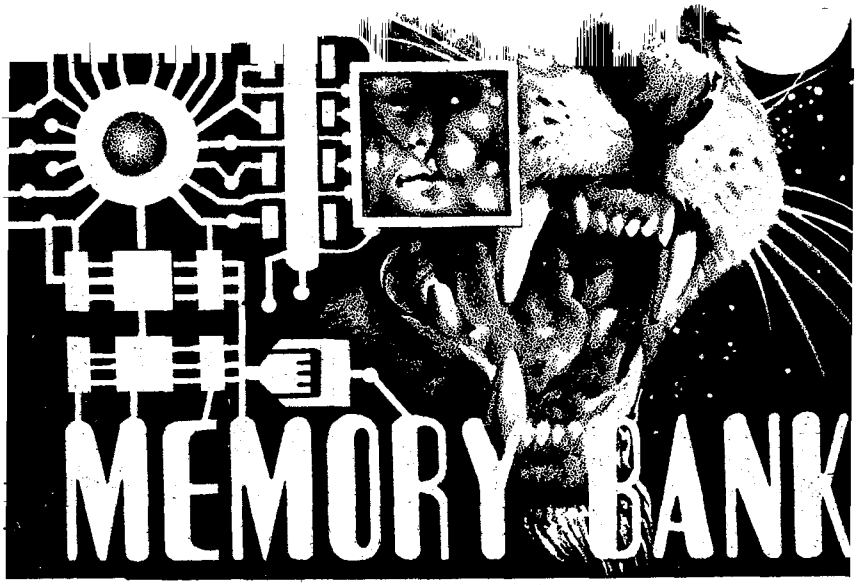

When there were only three thousand people alive on the moon after the Occupation it was easy for us to sterilize everything. So the medico doesn't need to wear gloves like surgeons used to, or even wash her hands. There's no danger of infection. But it isn't polite. We don't want this man to think we're being impolite to him, just because his nervous system is disconnected and he can't do anything about it, do we?"

"No, teacher."

"What's a surgeon?"

"What's 'infection'?"

Fingal wished the little perishers had chosen another day for their lessons, but like the teacher had said, there was very little he could do. The medico had turned his motor control over to the computer while she took the reading. He was paralyzed. He eyed the little boy carrying the carved stick, and hoped he didn't get a notion to poke him in the cerebrum with it. Fingal was insured, but who needs the trouble?

"All of you stand back a little so the medico can do her work. That's better. Now, who can tell me what the big green wire is? Destry?"

Destry allowed as how he didn't know, didn't care, and wished he could get out of here and play spat ball. The teacher dismissed him and went on with the others.

"The green wire is the main sounding electrode," the teacher said. "It's attached to a series of

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very fine wires in the man's head, like the ones you have, which are implanted at birth. Can anyone tell me how the recording is made?"

The little girl with the dirty hands spoke up.

"By tying knots in string."

The teacher laughed, but the medico didn't. She had heard it all before. So had the teacher, of course, but that was why he was a teacher. He had the patience to deal with children, a rare quality now that there were so few of them.

"No, that was just an analogy. Can you all say analogy?"

"*Analogy,*" they chorused.

"Fine. What I told you is that the chains of FPNA are very much *like* strings with knots tied in them. If you make up a code with every millimeter and every knot having a meaning, you could write words in string by tying knots in it. That's what the machine does with the FPNA. Now . . . can anyone tell me what FPNA stands for?"

"Ferro-Photo-Nucleic Acid," said the girl, who seemed to be the star pupil.

"That's right, Lupus. It's a variant on DNA, and it can be knotted by magnetic fields and light, and made to go through chemical changes. What the medico is doing now is threading long strings of FPNA into the tiny tubes that are in the man's brain. When she's done, she'll switch on the machine and the current will start tying knots. And what happens then?"

"All his memories go into the memory cube," said Lupus.

"That's right. But it's a little more complicated than that. You remember what I told you about a divided cipher? The kind that has two parts, neither of which is any good without the other? Imagine two of the strings, each with a lot of knots in them. Well, you try to read one of them with your decoder, and you find out that it doesn't make sense. That's because whoever wrote it used two strings, with knots tied in different places. They only make sense when you put them side-by-side and read them that way. That's how this decoder works, but the medico uses twenty-five strings. When they're all knotted the right way and put into the right openings in that cube over there," he pointed to the pink cube in the medico's bench, "they'll contain all this man's memories and personality, In a way, he'll be in the cube, but he won't know it, because he's going to be an african lion today."

This excited the children, who would much rather be stalking the Kenya savanna than listening to how a multi-holo was taken. When they quieted down the teacher went on, using analogies that got more strained by the minute.

"When the strings are in . . . class, pay attention. When they're in the cube, a current sets them in place. What we have then is a multi-holo. Can anyone tell me why

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we can't just take a tape-recording of what's going on in this man's brain, and use that?"

One of the boys answered, for once.

"Because memory isn't . . . what's that word?"

"Sequential?"

"Yeah, that's it. His memories are stashed all over his brain and there's no way to sort them out. So this recorder takes a picture of the whole thing at once. like a hologram. Does that mean you can cut the cube in half and have two people?"

"No, but that's a good question. This isn't that sort of hologram. This is something like . . . like when you press your hand into clay, but in four dimensions. If you chip off a part of the clay after it's dried, you lose part of the information, right? Well, this is sort of like that. You can't see the imprint because it's too small, but everything the man ever did and saw and heard and thought will be in the cube."

"Would you move back a little?" asked the medico. The children in the mirror over Fingal's head shuffled back and became more than just heads with shoulders sticking out. The medico adjusted the last strand of FPNA suspended in his cortex to the close tolerances specified by the computer.

"I'd like to be a medico when I grow up," said one boy.

"I thought you wanted to go to college and study to be a scientist."

"Well, maybe. But my friend is teaching me to be a medico. It looks a lot easier."

"You should stay in school, Destry. I'm sure your parent will want you to make something of yourself." The medico fumed silently. She knew better than to speak up—education was a serious business and interference with the duties of a teacher carried a stiff fine. But she was obviously pleased when the class thanked her and went out the door, leaving dirty footprints behind them.

She viciously flipped a switch, and Fingal found he could breath and move the muscles in his head.

"Lousy conceited college graduate," she said. "What the hell's wrong with getting your hands dirty, I ask you?" She wiped the blood from her hands onto her blue smock.

"Teachers are the worst," Fingal said.

"Ain't it the truth? Well, being a medico is nothing to be ashamed of. So I didn't go to college, so what? I can do my job, and I can see what I've done when I'm through. I always did like working with my hands. Did you know that being a medico used to be one of the most respected professions there was?"

"Really?"

"Fact. They had to go to college for years and years, and they made a hell of a lot of money, let me tell you."

Fingal said nothing, thinking she

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must be exaggerating. What was so tough about medicine? Just a little mechanical sense and a steady hand, that was all you needed. Fingal did a lot of maintenance on his body himself, going to the shop only for major work. And a good thing, at the prices they charged. It was not the sort of thing one discussed while lying helpless on the table, however.

"Okay, that's done." She pulled out the modules that contained the invisible FPNA and set them in the developing solution. She fastened Fingal's skull back on and tightened the recessed screws set into the bone. She turned his motor control back over to him while she sealed his scalp back into place. He stretched and yawned. He always grew sleepy in the medico's shop; he didn't know why.

"Will that be all for today, sir? We've got a special on blood changes, and since you'll just be lying there while you're out doppling in the park, you might as well . . ."

"No, thanks. I had it changed a year ago. Didn't you read my history?"

She picked up the card and glanced at it. "So you did. Fine. You can get up now, Mr. Fingal." She made a note on the card and set it down on the table. The door opened and a small face peered in.

"I left my stick," said the boy. He came in and started looking under things, to the annoyance of the medico. She attempted to ignore the boy as she took down the rest of the information she needed.

"And are you going to experience this holiday now, or wait until your double has finished and play it back then?"

"Huh? Oh, you mean . . . yes, I see. No, I'll go right into the animal. My psychist advised me to come out here for my nerves, so it wouldn't do me much good to wait it out, would it?"

"No, I suppose it wouldn't. So you'll be sleeping here while you dopple in the park. Hey!" She turned to confront the little boy, who was poking his nose into things he should stay away from. She grabbed him and pulled him away.

"You either find what you're looking for in one minute or you get out of here, you see?" He went back to his search, giggling behind his hand and looking for more interesting things to fool around with.

The medico made a check on the card, glanced at the glowing numbers on her thumbnail and discovered her shift was almost over. She connected the memory cube through a machine to a terminal in the back of his head.

"You've never done this before, right? We do this to avoid blank spots, which can be confusing sometimes. The cube is almost set, but now I'll add the last ten minutes to the record at the same time as I put you to sleep. That way you'll experience no disorientation, you'll

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move through a dream state to full awareness of being in the body of a lion. Your body will be removed and taken to one of our slumber rooms while you're gone. There's nothing to worry about."

Fingal wasn't worried, just tired and tense. He wished she would go on and do it and stop talking about it. And he wished the little boy would stop pounding his stick against the table leg. He wondered if his headache would be transferred to the lion.

She turned him off.

* * *

They hauled his body away and took his memory cube to the installation room. The medico chased the boy into the corridor and hosed down the recording room. Then she was off to a date she was already late for.

The employees of Kenya disneyland installed the cube into a metal box set into the skull of a full-grown African lioness. The social structure of lions being what it was, the proprietors charged a premium for the use of a male body, but Fingal didn't care one way or the other.

A short ride in an underground railroad with the sedated body of the Fingal-lioness, and he was deposited beneath the blazing sun of the Kenya savanna. He awoke, sniffed the air, and felt better immediately.

The Kenya disneyland was a total environment buried twenty kilometers beneath Mare Moscoviense on the farside of Luna. It was roughly circular with a radius of two hundred kilometers. From the ground to the "sky" was two kilometers except over the full-sized replica of Kilimanjaro, where it bulged to allow clouds to form in a realistic manner over the snowcap.

The illusion was flawless. The ground curved away consistent with the curvature of the Earth, so that the horizon was much more distant than anything Fingal was used to. The trees were real, and so were all the animals. At night an astronomer would have needed a spectroscope to distinguish the stars from the real thing.

Fingal certainly couldn't spot anything wrong. Not that he wanted to. The colors were strange but that was from the limitations of feline optics. Sounds were much more vivid, as were smells. If he'd thought about it, he would have realized the gravity was much too weak for Kenya. But he wasn't thinking; he'd come here to avoid that necessity.

It was hot and glorious. The dry grass made no sound as he walked over it on broad pads. He smelled antelope, wildebeest, and . . . was that baboon? He felt pangs of hunger but he really didn't want to hunt. But he found the lioness body starting on a stalk anyway.

Fingal was in an odd position. He

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was in control of the lioness, but only more or less. He could guide her where he wanted to go, but he had no say at all over instinctive behaviors. He was as much a pawn to these as the lioness was. In one sense, he *was* the lioness; when he wished to raise a paw or turn around, he simply did it. The motor control was complete. It felt great to walk on all fours, and it came as easily as breathing. But the scent of the antelope went on a direct route from the nostrils to the lower brain, made a connection with the rumblings of hunger, and started him on the stalk.

The guidebook said to surrender to it. Fighting it wouldn't do anyone any good, and could frustrate you. If you were paying to be a lion, read the chapter on "Things to Do," you might as well *be* one, not just wear the body and see the sights.

Fingal wasn't sure he liked this as he came up downwind and crouched behind a withered clump of scrub. He pondered it while he sized up the dozen or so antelope grazing just a few meters from him, picking out the small, the weak, and the young with a predator's eye. Maybe he should back out now and go on his way. These beautiful creatures were not harming him. The Fingal part of him wished mostly to admire them, not eat them.

Before he quite knew what had happened, he was standing triumphant over the bloody body of a small antelope. The others were just dusty trails in the distance.

It had been incredible!

The lioness was fast, but might as well have been moving in slow-motion compared to the antelope. Her only advantage lay in surprise, confusion, and quick, all-out attack. There had been the lifting of a head, ears had flicked toward the bush he was hiding in, and he had exploded. Ten seconds of furious exertion and he bit down on a soft throat, felt the blood gush and the dying kicks of the hind legs under his paws. He was breathing hard and the blood coursed through his veins. There was only one way to release the tension.

He threw his head back and roared his bloodlust.

* * *

He'd had it with lions at the end of the weekend. It wasn't worth it for the few minutes of exhiliration at the kill. It was a life of endless stalking, countless failures, then a pitiful struggle to get a few bites for yourself from the kill you had made. He found to his chagrin that his lioness was very low in the dominance-order. When he got his kill back to the pride—he didn't know why he had dragged it back but the lioness seemed to know—it was promptly stolen from him. He/she sat back helplessly and watched the dominant male take his

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share, followed by the rest of the pride. He was left with a dried haunch four hours later, and had to contest even that with vultures and hyenas. He saw what the premium payment was for. That male had it *easy*.

But he had to admit that it had been worth it. He felt better; his psychist had been right. It did one good to leave the insatiable computers at his office for a weekend of simple living. There were no complicated choices to be made out here. If he was in doubt, he listened to his instincts. It was just that the next time, he'd go as an elephant. He'd been watching them. All the other animals pretty much left them alone, and he could see why. To be a solitary bull, free to wander where he wished with food as close as the nearest tree branch . . .

He was still thinking about it when the collection crew came for him.

* * *

He awoke with the vague feeling that something was wrong. He sat up in bed and looked around him. Nothing seemed to be out of place. There was no one in the room with him. He shook his head to clear it.

It didn't do any good. There was still something wrong. He tried to remember how he had gotten there, and laughed at himself. His own bedroom! What was so remarkable about that?

But hadn't there been a vacation, a week-end trip? He remembered being a lion, eating raw antelope meat, being pushed around within the pride, fighting it out with the other females and losing and retiring to rumble to him/herself.

Certainly he should have come back to human consciousness in the disneyland medical section. He couldn't remember it. He reached for his phone, not knowing who he wished to call. His psychist, perhaps, or the Kenya office.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fingal," the phone told him. "This line is no longer available for outgoing calls. If you'll . . ."

"Why not?" he asked, irritated and confused. "I paid my bill."

"That is of no concern to this department, Mr. Fingal. And please do not interrupt. It's hard enough to reach you. I'm fading, but the message will be continued if you look to your right." The voice and the power hum behind it faded. The phone was dead.

Fingal looked to his right and jerked in surprise. There was a hand, a woman's hand, writing on his wall. The hand faded out at the wrist.

"*Mene, Mene* . . ." it wrote, in thin letters of fire. Then the hand waved in irritation and erased that with its thumb. The wall was smudged with soot where the words had been.

"You're projecting, Mr. Fingal." the hand wrote, quickly etching out

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the words with a manicured nail. "That's what you expected to see." The hand underlined the word "expected" three times. "Please cooperate, clear your mind, and see what is *there,* or we're not going to get anywhere. Damn, I've about exhausted this medium."

And indeed it had. The writing had filled the wall and the hand was now down near the floor. The apparition wrote smaller and smaller in an effort to get it all in.

Fingal had an excellent grasp on reality, according to his psychist. He held tightly onto that evaluation like a talisman as he leaned closer to the wall to read the last sentence.

"Look on your bookshelf," the hand wrote. "The title is *Orientation in your Fantasy World.*"

Fingal knew he had no such book, but could think of nothing better to do.

His phone didn't work, and if he was going through a psychotic episode he didn't think it wise to enter the public corridor until he had some idea of what was going on. The hand faded out, but the writing continued to smoulder.

He found the book easily enough. It was a pamphlet, actually, with a gaudy cover. It was the sort of thing he had seen in the outer offices of the Kenya disneyland, a promotional booklet. At the bottom it said, "Published under the auspices of the Kenya computer; A. Joachim, operator." He opened it and began to read.

CHAPTER ONE

"Where Am I?"

You're probably wondering by now where you are. This is an entirely healthy and normal reaction, Mr. Fingal. Anyone would wonder, when beset by what seem to be paranormal manifestations, if his grasp on reality had weakened. Or, in simple language, "Am I nuts, or what?"

No, Mr. Fingal, you are not nuts. But you are not, as you probably think, sitting on your bed, reading a book. It's all in your mind. You are still in the Kenya disneyland. More specifically, you are contained in the memory cube we took of you before your weekend on the savanna. You see, there's been a big goof-up.

CHAPTER TWO

"What Happened?"

We'd like to know that, too, Mr. Fingal. But here's what we do know. Your body has been misplaced. Now, there's nothing to worry about, we're doing all we can to locate it and find out how it happened but it will take some time. Maybe it's small consolation, but this has never happened before in the seventy-five years we've been operating, and as soon as we find out how it happened this time, you can be sure we'll be careful not to let it happen again. We're pursuing several leads at this time, and you can rest easy that your body will be

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returned to you intact just as soon as we locate it.

You are awake and aware right now because we have incorporated your memory cube into the workings of our H-210 computer, one of the finest holo-memory systems available to modern business. You see, there are a few problems.

CHAPTER THREE
"*What* Problems?"

It's kind of hard to put in terms you'd understand, but let's take a crack at it, shall we?

The medium we use to record your memories isn't the one you've probably used yourself as insurance against accidental death. As you must know, that system will store your memories for up to twenty years with no degradation or loss of information, and is quite expensive. The system we use is a temporary one, good for two, five, fourteen, or twenty-eight days, depending on the length of your stay. Your memories are put in the cube, where you might expect them to remain static and unchanging, like they do in your insurance-recording. If you thought that, you would be wrong, Mr. Fingal. Think about it. If you die, your bank will immediately start a clone from the plasm you stored along with the memory cube. In six months, your memories would be played back into the clone and you would awaken, missing the memories that were accumulated in your body from the time of your last recording. Perhaps this has happened to you. If it has, you know the shock of wakening from the recording process to be told that it is three or four years later, and that you died in that time.

In any case, the process we use is an *ongoing* one, or it would be worthless to you. The cube we install in the African animal of your choice is capable of adding the memories of your stay in Kenya to the memory cube. When your visit is over, these memories are played back into your brain and you leave the disneyland with the exciting, educational, and refreshing experiences you had as an animal, though your body never left our slumber room. This is known as "doppling," from the German *doppelganger*.

Now, to the problems we talked about. Thought we'd *never* get around to them, didn't you?

First, since you registered for a week-end stay, the medico naturally used one of the two-day cubes as part of our budget-excursion fare. These cubes have a safety factor, but aren't much good beyond three days at best. At the end of that time the cube would start to deteriorate. Of course, we fully expect to have you installed in your own body

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before then. Additionally, there is the problem of storage. Since these ongoing memory cubes are intended to be in use all the time your memories are stored in them, it presents certain problems when we find ourselves in the spot we are now in. Are you following me, Mr. Fingal? While the cube has already passed its potency for use in co-existing with a live host, like the lioness you just left, it *must* be kept in constant activation at all times or loss of information results. I'm sure you wouldn't want that to happen, would you? Of course not. So what we have done is to "plug you in" to our computer, which will keep you aware and healthy and guard against the randomizing of your memory nexi. I won't go into that; let it stand that randomizing is not the sort of thing you'd like to have happen to you.

CHAPTER FOUR

"So What Gives, Huh?"

I'm glad you asked that. (Because you *did* ask that, Mr. Fingal. This booklet is part of the analogizing process that I'll explain further down the page.)

Life in a computer is not the sort of thing you could just jump into and hope to retain the world-picture-compatibility so necessary for sane functioning in this complex society. This has been tried, so take our word for it. Or rather, my word. Did I introduce myself? I'm Apollonia Joachim, First Class Operative for the DataSafe computer trouble-shooting firm. You've probably never heard of us, even though you do work with computers.

Since you can't just come aware in the baffling, on-and-off world that passes for reality in a data system, your mind, in cooperation with an analogizing program I've given the computer, interprets things in ways that seem safe and comfortable to it. The world you see around you is a figment of your imagination. Of course, it looks real to you because it comes from the same part of the mind that you normally use to interpret reality. If we wanted to get philosophical about it, we could probably argue all day about what constitutes reality and why the one you are perceiving now is any less real than the one you are used to. But let's not get into that, all right?

The world will likely continue to function in ways you are accustomed for it to function. It won't be exactly the same. Nightmares, for instance. Mr. Fingal, I hope you aren't the nervous type, because your nightmares can come to life where you are. They'll seem quite real. You should avoid them if you can, because they can do you real harm. I'll say more about this later if I need to. For now, there's no need to worry.

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CHAPTER FIVE

"What Do I Do Now?"

I'd advise you to continue with your normal activities. Don't be alarmed at anything unusual. For one thing, I can only communicate with you by means of paranormal phenomena. You see, when a message from me is fed into the computer it reaches you in a way your brain is not capable of dealing with. Naturally, your brain classifies this as an unusual event and fleshes the communication out in unusual fashion. Most of the weird things you see, if you stay calm and don't let your own fears out of the closet to persecute you, will be me. Otherwise, I anticipate that your world should look, feel, taste, sound, and smell pretty normal. I've talked to your psychist. He assures me that your world-grasp is strong. So sit tight. We'll be working hard to get you out of there.

CHAPTER SIX

"Help!"

Yes, we'll help you. This is a truly unfortunate thing to have happened, and of course we will refund all your money promptly. In addition, the lawyer for Kenya wants me to ask you if a lump sum settlement against all future damages is a topic worthy of discussion. You can think about it, there's no hurry.

In the meantime, I'll find ways to answer your questions. It might become unwieldy the harder your mind struggles to normalize my communications into things you are familiar with. That is both your greatest strength—the ability of your mind to bend the computer world it doesn't wish to see into media you are familiar with—and my biggest handicap. Look for me in tea-leaves, on billboards, on holovision; anywhere! It could be exciting if you get into it.

Meanwhile, if you have received this message you can talk to me by filling in the attached coupon and dropping it in the mailtube. Your reply will probably be waiting for you at the office. Good luck!

Yes! I received your message, and am interested in the exciting opportunities in the field of *computer living*! Please send me, without cost or obligation, your exciting catalog telling me how I can *move up* to the big, wonderful world outside!

NAME .....
ADDRESS .....
I.D. .....

Fingal fought the urge to pinch himself. If what this booklet said was true—and he might as well believe it—it would hurt and he would *not* wake up. He pinched himself anyway. It hurt.

If he understood this right, everything around him was the product of his imagination. Somewhere, a woman was sitting at a computer input and talking to him in normal

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language, which came to his brain in the form of electron pulses it could not cope with and so edited into forms he was conversant with. He was analogizing like mad. He wondered if he had caught it from the teacher, if analogies were contagious.

"What the hell's wrong with a simple voice from the air?" he wondered aloud. He got no response, and was rather glad. He'd had enough mysteriousness for now. And on second thought, a voice from the air would probably scare the pants off him.

He decided his brain must know what it was doing. After all, the hand startled him but he hadn't panicked. He could *see* it, and he trusted his visual sense more than he did voices from the air, a classical sign of insanity if ever there was one.

He got up and went to the wall. The letters of fire were gone, but the black smudge of the erasure was still there. He sniffed it: carbon. He fingered the rough paper of the pamphlet, tore off a corner, put it in his mouth and chewed it. It tasted like paper.

He sat down and filled out the coupon and tossed it to the mail-tube.

Fingal didn't get angry about it until he was at the office. He was an easy-going person, slow to boil. But he finally reached a point where he had to say something.

Everything had been so normal he wanted to laugh. All his friends and acquaintances were there, doing exactly what he would have expected them to be doing. What amazed and bemused him was the number and variety of spear-carriers, minor players in this internal soap-opera. The extras that his mind had cooked up to people the crowded corridors; like the man he didn't know who had bumped into him on the tube to work, apologized, and disappeared, presumably back into the bowels of his imagination.

There was nothing he could do to vent his anger but test the whole absurd set-up. There was doubt lingering in his mind that the whole morning had been a fugue, a temporary lapse into dreamland. Maybe he'd never gone to Kenya, after all, and his mind was playing tricks on him. To get him there, or keep him away? He didn't know, but he could worry about that if the test failed.

He stood up at his desk-terminal, which was in the third column of the fifteenth row of other identical desks, each with its diligent worker. He held up his hands and whistled. Everyone looked up.

"I don't believe in you," he screeched. He picked up a stack of tapes on his desk and hurled them at Felicia Nahum at the desk next to his. Felicia was a good friend of his, and she registered the proper shock until the tapes hit her. Then she melted. He looked around the

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room and saw that everything had stopped like a freeze-frame in a motion picture.

He sat down and drummed his fingers on his desk top. His heart was pounding and his face was flushed. For an awful moment he had thought he was wrong. He began to calm down, glancing up every few seconds to be sure the world really *had* stopped.

In three minutes he was in a cold sweat. What the hell had he *proved*? That this morning had been real, or that he really was crazy? It dawned on him that he would never be able to test the assumptions under which he lived. A line of print flashed across his terminal.

"But when could you ever do so, Mr. Fingal?"

"Ms. Joachim?" he shouted, looking around him. "Where are you? I'm afraid."

"You mustn't be," the terminal printed. "Calm yourself. You have a strong sense of reality, remember? Think about this: even before today, how could you be sure the world you saw was not the result of catatonic delusions? Do you see what I mean? The question 'What is reality?' is, in the end, unanswerable. We all must accept at some point what we see and are told, and live by a set of untested and untestable assumptions. I ask you to accept the set I gave you this morning because, sitting here in the computer room where you cannot see me, my world-picture tells me that they are the true set. On the other hand, you could believe that I'm deluding myself, that there's nothing in the pink cube I see and that you're a spear-carrier in *my* dream. Does that make you more comfortable?"

"No," he mumbled, ashamed of himself. "I see what you mean. Even if I am crazy, it would be more comfortable to go along with it than to keep fighting it."

"Perfect, Mr. Fingal. If you need further illustrations you could imagine yourself locked in a straitjacket. Perhaps there are technicians laboring right now to correct your condition, and they are putting you through this psycho-drama as a first step. Is that any more attractive?"

"No, I guess it isn't."

"The point is that it's as reasonable an assumption as the set of facts I gave you this morning. But the main point is that you should behave the same if either set is true. Do you see? To fight it in the one case will only cause you trouble, and in the other, would impede the treatment. I realize I'm asking you to accept me on faith. And that's all I can give you."

"I believe in you," he said. "Now, can you start everything going again?"

"I told you I'm not in control of your world. In fact, it's a considerable obstacle to me, seeing as I have to talk to you in these awkward ways. But things should get going on their own as soon as you let them. Look up.

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He did, and saw the normal hum and bustle of the office. Felicia was there at her desk, as though nothing had happened. Nothing had. Yes, something had, after all. The tapes were scattered on the floor near his desk, where they had fallen. They had unreeled in an unruly mess.

He started to pick them up, then saw they weren't as messy as he had thought. They spelled out a message in coils of tape.

"You're back on the track," it said.

* * *

For three weeks Fingal was a very good boy. His co-workers, had they been real people, might have noticed a certain standoffishness in him, and his social life at home was drastically curtailed. Otherwise, he behaved exactly as if everything around him were real.

But his patience had limits. This had already dragged on far beyond what he had expected of it. He began to fidget at his desk, let his mind wander. Feeding information into a computer can be frustrating, unrewarding, and eventually stultifying. He had been feeling it even before his trip to Kenya; it had been the *cause* of his trip to Kenya. He was sixty-eight years old, with centuries ahead of him, and stuck in a ferro-magnetic rut. Longlife could be a mixed blessing when you felt boredom creeping up on you.

What was getting to him was the growing disgust with his job. It was bad enough when he merely sat in a real office with two hundred real people shoveling slightly unreal data into a much-less-than-real-to-his-senses computer. How much worse now, when he knew that the data he handled had no meaning to anyone but himself, was nothing but occupational therapy created by his mind and a computer program to keep him busy while Joachim searched for his body?

For the first time in his life he began punching some buttons for himself. Under slightly less stress he would have gone to see his psychist, the approved and perfectly normal thing to do. Here, he knew he would only be talking to himself. He failed to perceive the advantages of such an idealized psychoanlytic process; he'd never really believed that a psychist did little but listen in the first place.

He began to change his own life when he became irritated with his boss. She pointed out to him that his error-index was on the rise, and suggested that he shape up or begin looking for another source of employment.

This enraged him. He'd been a good worker for twenty-five years. Why should she take that attitude when he was just not feeling himself for a week or two?

Then he was angrier than ever when he thought about her being merely a projection of his own mind. Why should he let *her* push him around?

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"I don't want to hear it," he said. "Leave me alone. Better yet, give me a raise in salary."

"Fingal," she said promptly, "you've been a credit to your section these last weeks. I'm going to give you a raise."

"Thank you. Go away." She did, by dissolving into thin air. This really made his day. He leaned back in his chair and and thought about his situation for the first time since he was young.

He didn't like what he saw.

In the middle of his ruminations, his computer screen lit up again.

"Watch it, Fingal," it read. "That way lies catatonia."

He took the warning seriously, but didn't intend to abuse the newfound power. He didn't see why judicious use of it now and then would hurt anything. He stretched, and yawned broadly. He looked around, suddenly hated the office with its rows of workers indistinguishable from their desks. Why not take the day off?

On impulse, he got up and walked the few steps to Felicia's desk.

"Why don't we go to my house and make love?" he asked her.

She looked at him in astonishment, and he grinned. She was almost as surprised as when he had hurled the tapes at her.

"Is this a joke? In the middle of the day? You have a job to do, you know. You want to get us fired?"

He shook his head slowly. "That's not an acceptable answer."

She stopped, and rewound from that point, He heard her repeat her last sentences backwards, then she smiled.

"Sure, why not?" she said.

Felicia left afterwards in the same, slightly disconcerting way his boss had left earlier; by melting into the air. Fingal sat quietly in his bed, wondering what to do with himself. He felt he was getting off to a bad start if he intended to edit his world with care.

His telephone rang.

"You're damn right," said a woman's voice, obviously irritated with him. He sat up straight.

"Apollonia?"

"Ms. Joachim to you, Fingal. I can't talk long, this is quite a strain on me. But listen to me, and listen hard. Your navel is very deep, Fingal. From where you're standing, it's a pit I can't even see the bottom of. If you fall into it I can't guarantee to pull you out."

"But do I have to take *everything* as it is? Aren't I allowed some self-improvement?"

"Don't kid yourself. That wasn't self-improvement. That was sheer laziness. It was nothing but masturbation, and while there's nothing wrong with that, if you do it to the exclusion of all else your mind will grow in on itself. You're in grave danger of excluding the external universe from your reality."

"But I thought there was no external universe for me here."

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"Almost right. But I'm feeding you external stimuli to keep you going. Besides, it's the attitude that counts. You've never had trouble finding sexual partners; why do you feel compelled to alter the odds now?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "Like you said, laziness, I guess."

"That's right. If you want to quit your job, feel free. If you're serious about self-improvement, there are opportunities available to you there. Search them out. Look around you, explore. But don't try to meddle in things you don't understand. I've got to go now. I'll write you a letter if I can, and explain more."

"Wait! What about my body? Have they made any progress?"

"Yes, they've found out how it happened. It seems . . ." her voice faded out, and he switched off the phone.

The next day he received a letter explaining what was known so far. It seemed that the mix-up had resulted from the visit of the teacher to the medico section on the day of his recording. More specifically, the return of the little boy after the others had left. They were sure now that he had tampered with the routine card that told the attendants what to do with Fingal's body. Instead of moving it to the slumber room, which was a green card, they had sent it somewhere—no one knew where yet—for a sex change, which was a blue card. The medico, in her haste to get home for her date, had not noticed the switch. Now the body could be in any of several thousand medico shops in Luna. They were looking for it, and for the boy.

Fingal put the letter down and did some hard thinking.

Joachim had said there were opportunities for him in the memory banks. She had also said that not everything he saw was his own projections. He was receiving, was capable of receiving, external stimuli. Why was that? Because he would tend to randomize without them, or some other reason? He wished the letter had gone into that.

In the meantime, what did he do?

Suddenly he had it. He wanted to learn about computers. He wanted to know what made them tick, to feel a sense of power over them. It was particularly strong when he thought about being a virtual prisoner inside one. He was like a worker on an assembly line. All day long he labors, taking small parts off a moving belt and installing them on larger assemblies. One day, he happens to wonder who puts the parts on the belt? Where do they come from? How are they made? What happens after he installs them?

He wondered why he hadn't thought of it before.

* * *

The admissions office of the Lunar People's Technical School

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was crowded. He was handed a form and told to fill it out. It looked bleak. The spaces for "previous experience" and "aptitude scores" were almost blank when he was through with them. All in all, not a very promising application. He went to the desk and handed the form to the man sitting at the terminal.

The man fed it into the computer, which promptly decided Fingal had no talent for being a computer repairperson. He started to turn away, when his eye was caught by a large poster behind the man. It had been there on the wall when he came in, but he hadn't read it.

LUNA NEEDS
COMPUTER TECHNICIANS
THIS MEANS YOU,
MR. FINGAL!

Are you dissatisfied with your present employment? Do you feel you were cut out for better things? Then today may be your lucky day. You've come to the right place, and if you grasp this golden opportunity you will find doors opening that were closed to you.

Act, Mr. Fingal. This is the time. Who's to check up on you? Just take that stylus and fill it in any old way you want. Be grandiose, be daring! The fix is in, and you're on your way to BIG MONEY!

The secretary saw nothing unusual about Fingal coming to the desk a second time, and didn't even blink when the computer decided he was eligible for the accelerated course.

* * *

It wasn't easy at first. He really did have little aptitude for electronics, but aptitude is a slippery thing. His personality matrix was as flexible now as it would ever be. A little effort at the right time would go a long way toward self-improvement. What he kept telling himself was that everything that made him what he was was etched in that tiny cube wired in to the computer, and if he was careful he could edit it.

Not radically, Joachim told him in a long, helpful letter later in the week. That way led to complete disruption of the FPNA matrix and catatonia, which in this case would be distinguishable from death only to a hair-splitter.

He thought a lot about death as he dug into the books. He was in a strange position. The being known as Fingal would not die in any conceivable outcome of this adventure. For one thing, his body was going toward a sex change and it was hard to imagine what could happen to it that would kill it. Whoever had custody of it now would be taking care of it just as well as the medicos in the slumber room would have. If Joachim was unsuccessful in her attempt to keep him aware and sane

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in the memory bank, he would merely awake and remember nothing from the time he fell asleep on the table.

If, by some compounded unlikelihood, his body *was* allowed to die, he had an insurance recording safe in the vault of his bank. The recording was three years old. He would awaken in the newly-grown clone body knowing nothing of the last three years, and would have a fantastic story to listen to as he was brought up to date.

But none of that mattered to *him*. Humans are a time-binding species, existing in an eternal *now*. The future flows through them and becomes the past, but it is always the present that counts. The Fingal of three years ago was *not* the Fingal in the memory bank. The simple fact about immortality by memory recording was that it was a poor solution. The three-dimensional cross-section that was the Fingal of now must always behave as if his life depended on his actions, for he would feel the pain of death if it happened to him. It was small consolation to a dying man to know that he would go on, several years younger and less wise. If Fingal lost out here, he would *die*, because with memory recording he was three people: the one who lived now, the one lost somewhere on Luna, and the one potential person in the bank vault. They were really no more than close relatives.

Everyone knew this, but it was so much better than the alternative that few people rejected it. They tried not to think about it and were generally successful. They had recordings made as often as they could afford them. They heaved a sigh of relief as they got onto the table to have another recording taken, knowing that another chunk of their lives was safe for all time. But they awaited the awakening nervously, dreading being told that it was now twenty years later because they had died sometime after the recording and had to start all over. A lot can happen in twenty years. The person in the new clone body might have to cope with a child he or she had never seen, a new spouse, or the shattering news that his or her employment was now the function of a machine.

So Fingal took Joachim's warnings seriously. Death was death, and though he could cheat it, death still had the last laugh. Instead of taking your whole life from you, death now only claimed a percentage, but in many ways it was the most important percentage.

He enrolled in classes. Whenever possible he took the ones that were available over the phone lines so he needn't stir from his room. He ordered his food and supplies by phone and paid his bills by looking at them and willing them out of existence. It could have been intensely boring, or it could have been wildly interesting. After all, it was a dream-world, and who

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doesn't think of retiring into fantasy from time to time? Fingal certainly did, but firmly suppressed the idea when it came. He intended to get out of this dream.

For one thing, he missed the company of other people. He waited for the weekly letters from Apollonia (she now allowed him to call her by her first name) with a consuming passion and devoured every word. His file of such letters bulged. At lonely moments he would pull one out at random and read it again and again.

On her advice, he left the apartment regularly and stirred around more or less at random. During these outings he had wild adventures. Literally. Apollonia hurled the external stimuli at him during these times and they could be anything from The Mummy's Curse to Custer's Last Stand with the original cast. It beat hell out of the movies. He would just walk down the public corridors and open a door at random. Behind it might be King Solomon's mines or the sultan's harem. He endured them all stoically. He was unable to get any pleasure from sex. He knew it was a one-handed exercise, and it took all the excitement away.

His only pleasure came in his studies. He read everything he could about computer science and came to stand at the head of his class. And as he learned, it began to occur to him to apply his knowledge to his own situation.

He began seeing things around him that had been veiled before. Patterns. The reality was starting to seep through his illusions. Every so often he would look up and see the faintest shadow of the real world of electron flow and fluttering circuits he inhabited. It scared him at first. He asked Apollonia about it on one of his dream journeys, this time to Coney Island in the mid-twentieth century. He liked it there. He could lay on the sand and talk to the surf. Overhead, a skywriter's plane spelled out the answers to his questions. He studiously ignored the brontosaurus rampaging through the roller coaster off to his right.

"What does it mean, O Goddess of Transistoria, when I begin to see circuit diagrams on the walls of my apartment? Overwork?"

"It means the illusion is beginning to wear thin," the plane spelled out over the next half-hour. "You're adapting to the reality you have been denying. It could be trouble, but we're hot on the trail of your body. We should have it soon and get you out of there." This had been too much for the plane. The sun was going down now, the brontosaurus vanished, and the plane ran out of gas. It spiraled into the ocean and the crowds surged closer to the water to watch the rescue. Fingal got up and went back to the boardwalk.

There was a huge billboard. He laced his fingers behind his back and read it.

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"Sorry for the delay. As I was saying, we're almost there. Give us another few months. One of our agents thinks he will be at the right medico shop in about one week's time. From there it should go quickly. For now, avoid those places where you see the circuits showing through. They're no good for you, take my word for it."

Fingal avoided the circuits as long as he could. He finished his first courses in computer science and enrolled in the intermediate section. Six months rolled by.

His studies got easier and easier. His reading speed was increasing phenomenally. He found that it was more advantageous for him to see the library as composed of books instead of tapes. He could take a book from the shelf, flip through it rapidly, and know everything that was in it. He knew enough now to realize that he was acquiring a facility to interface directly with the stored knowledge in the computer, bypassing his senses entirely. The books he held in his hands were merely the sensual analogs of the proper terminals to touch. Apollonia was nervous about it, but let him go on. He breezed through the intermediate and graduated into the advanced classes.

But he was surrounded by wires. Everywhere he turned, in the patterns of veins beneath the surface of a man's face, in a plate of french fries he ordered for lunch, in his palmprints, overlaying the apparent disorder of a head of blonde hair on the pillow beside him.

The wires were analogs of analogs. There was little in a modern computer that consisted of wiring. Most of it was made of molecular circuits that were either embedded in a crystal lattice or photographically reproduced on a chip of silicon. Visually, they were hard to imagine, so his mind was making up these complex circuit diagrams that served the same purpose but could be experienced directly.

One day he could resist it no longer. He was in the bathroom, on the traditional place for the pondering of the imponderable. His mind wandered, speculating on the necessity of moving his bowels, wondering if he might safely eliminate the need to eliminate. His toe idly traced out the pathways of a circuit board incorporated in the pattern of tiles on the floor.

The toilet began to overflow, not with water, but with coins. Bells were ringing happily. He jumped up and watched in bemusement as his bathroom filled with money.

He became aware of a subtle alteration in the tone of the bells. They changed from the merry clang of jackpot to the tolling of a death knell. He hastily looked around for a manifestation. He knew that Apollonia would be angry.

She was. Her hand appeared and began to write on the wall. This time the writing was in his blood. It

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dripped menacingly from the words.

"What are you doing?" the hand wrote, and having writ, moved on. "I told you to leave the wires alone. Do you know what you've done? You may have wiped the financial records for Kenya. It could take *months* to straighten them out."

"Well what do I care?" he exploded. "What have they done for me lately? It's *incredible* that they haven't located my body by now. It's been a full *year*."

The hand was bunched up in a fist. Then it grabbed him around the throat and squeezed hard enough to make his eyes bulge out. It slowly relaxed. When Fingal could see straight, he backed warily away from it.

The hand fidgeted nervously, drummed its fingers on the floor. It went to the wall again.

"Sorry," it wrote, "I guess I'm getting tired. Hold on."

He waited, more shaken than he remembered being since his odyssey began. There's nothing like a dose of pain, he reflected, to make you realize that it *can* happen to you.

The wall with the words of blood slowly dissolved into a heavenly panorama. As he watched, clouds streamed by his vantage point and mixed beautifully with golden rays of sunshine. He heard organ music from pipes the size of sequoias.

He wanted to applaud. It was so overdone, and yet so convincing. In the center of the whirling mass of white mist an angel faded in. She had wings and a halo, but lacked the traditional white robe. She was nude, and hair floated around her as if she were underwater.

She levitated to him, walking on the billowing clouds, and handed him two stone tablets. He tore his eyes away from the apparition and glanced down at the tablets:

Thou shalt not screw around with things you do not understand.

"All right, I promise I won't," he told the angel. "Apollonia, is that you? Really you, I mean?"

"Read the Commandments, Fingal. This is hard on me."

He looked back at the tablets.

Thou shalt not meddle in the hardware systems of the Kenya Corporation, for Kenya shall not hold him idemnifiable who taketh freedoms with its property.

Thou shalt not explore the limits of thy prison. Trust in the Kenya Corporation to extract thee.

Thou shalt not program.

Thou shalt not worry about the location of thy body, for it has been located, help is on the way, the cavalry has arrived, and all is in hand.

Thou shalt meet a tall, handsome stranger who will guide thee from thy current plight.

Thou shalt stay tuned for further developments.

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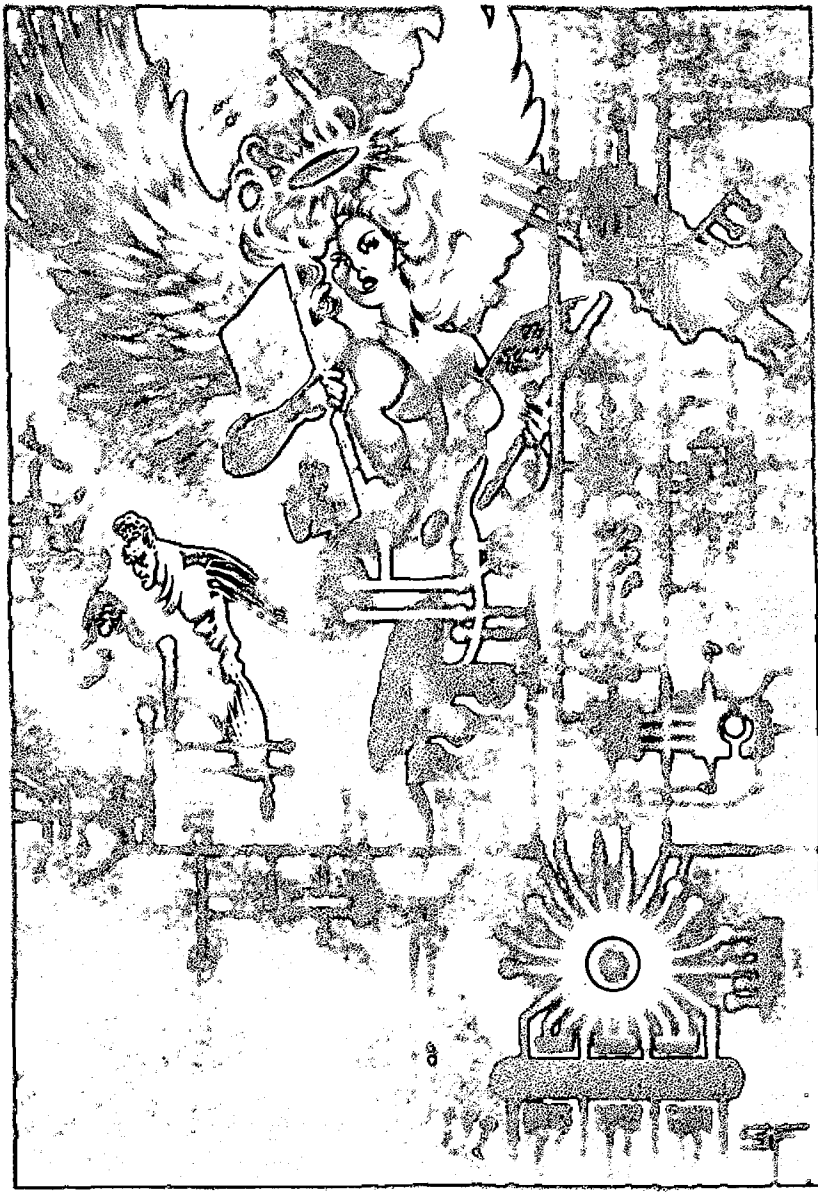

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He looked up and was happy to see that the angel was still there.

"I won't, I promise. But where is my body, and why has it taken so long to find it? Can you . . ."

"Know thee that appearing like this is a great taxation upon me, Mr. Fingal. I am undergoing strains the nature of which I have not time to reveal to thee. Hold thy horses, wait it out, and thou shalt soon see the light at the end of the tunnel."

"Wait, don't go." She was already starting to fade out.

"I cannot tarry."

"But . . . Apollonia, this is charming, but why do you appear to me in these crazy ways? Why all the pomp and circumstance? What's wrong with letters?"

She looked around her at the clouds, the sunbeams, the tablets in his hand, and at her body, as if seeing them for the first time. She threw her head back and laughed like a symphony orchestra. It was almost too beautiful for Fingal to bear.

"Me?" she said, dropping the angelic bearing. "Me? I don't pick 'em, Fingal. I told you, it's *your* head, and I'm just passing through." She arched her eyebrows at him. "And really, sir, I had no idea you felt this way about me. Is it puppy love?" And she was gone, except for the grin.

The grin haunted him for days. He was disgusted with himself about it. He hated to see a metaphor overworked so. He decided his mind was just an inept analogizer.

But everything had its purpose. The grin forced himself to look at his feelings. He was in love; hopelessly, ridiculously, just like a teenager. He got out all his old letters from her and read through them again, searching for the magic words that could have inflicted this on him. Because it was *silly*. He'd never met her except under highly figurative circumstances. The one time he saw her, most of what he saw was the product of his own mind.

There were no clues in the letters. Most of them were as impersonal as a textbook, though they tended to be rather chatty. Friendly, yes; but intimate, poetic, insightful, revealing? No. He failed utterly to put them together in any way that should add up to love, or even a teenage crush.

He attacked his studies with renewed vigor, awaiting the next communication. Weeks dragged by with no word. He called the post office several times, placed personal advertisements in every periodical he could think of, took to scrawling messages on public buildings, sealed notes in bottles and flushed them down the disposal, rented billboards, bought television time. He screamed at the empty walls of his apartment, buttonholed strangers, tapped Morse Code on the water pipes, started rumors in skid row taprooms, had leaflets published and distributed all over the

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solar system. He tried every medium he could think of, and could not contact her. He was alone.

He considered the possibility that he had died. In his present situation, it might be hard to tell for sure. He abandoned it as untestable. That line was hazy enough already without his efforts to determine which side of the life/death dichotomy he inhabited. Besides, the more he thought about existing as nothing more than kinks in a set of macromolecules plugged into a data system, the more it frightened him. He'd survived this long by avoiding such thoughts.

His nightmares moved in on him, set up housekeeping in his apartment. They were a severe disappointment, and confirmed his conclusion that his imagination was not as vivid as it might be. They were infantile boogeyman, the sort that might scare him when glimpsed hazily through the fog of a nightmare, but were almost laughable when exposed to the full light of consciousness. There was a large, talkative snake that was crudely put together, fashioned from the incomplete picture a child might have of a serpent. A toy company could have done a better job. There was a werewolf whose chief claim to dread was a tendency to shed all over Fingal's rugs. There was a woman who consisted mostly of breasts and genitals, left over from his adolescence, he suspected. He groaned in embarrassment every time he looked at her. If he had ever been that infantile he would rather have left the dirty traces of it buried forever.

He kept booting them into the corridor but they drifted in at night like poor relations. They talked incessantly, and always about him. The things they knew! They seemed to have a very low opinion of him. The snake often expressed the opinion that Fingal would never amount to anything because he had so docilely accepted the results of the aptitude tests he took as a child. That hurt, but the best salve for the wound was further study.

Finally a letter came. He winced as soon as he got it open. The salutation was enough to tell him he wasn't going to like it.

Dear Mr. Fingal,

I won't apologize for the delay this time. It seems that most of my manifestations have included an apology and I feel I deserved a rest this time. I can't be always on call. I have a life of my own.

I understand that you have behaved in an exemplary manner since I last talked with you. You have ignored the inner workings of the computer just as I told you to do. I haven't been completely frank with you, and I will explain my reasons.

The hook-up between you and the computer is, and always has been, two-way. Our greatest fear

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at this end had been that you would begin interfering with the workings of the computer, to the great discomfort of everyone. Or that you would go mad and run amuck, perhaps wrecking the entire data system. We installed you in the computer as a humane necessity, because you would have died if we had not done so, though it would have cost you only two days of memories. But Kenya is in the business of selling memories, and holds them to be a sacred trust. It was a mix-up on the part of the Kenya Corporation that got you here in the first place, so we decided we should do everything we could for you.

But it was at great hazard to our operations at this end.

Once, about six months ago, you got tangled in the weather-control sector of the computer and set off a storm over Kilimanjaro that is still not fully under control. Several animals were lost.

I have had to fight the Board of Directors to keep you on-line, and several times the program was almost terminated. You know what that means.

Now, I've leveled with you. I wanted to from the start, but the people who own things around here were worried that you might start fooling around out of a spirit of vindictiveness if you knew these facts, so they were kept from you. You could still

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do a great deal of damage before we could shut you off. I'm laying it on the line now, with Directors chewing their nails over my shoulder. *Please* stay out of trouble.

On to the other matter.

I was afraid from the outset that what has happened might happen. For over a year I've been your only contact with the world outside. I've been the only other person in your universe. I would have to be an extremely cold, hateful, awful person—which I am not—for you *not* to feel affection for me under those circumstances. You are suffering from intense sensory-deprivation, and it's well-known that someone in that state becomes pliable, suggestible, and lonely. You've attached your feelings to me as the only thing around worth caring for.

I've tried to avoid intimacy with you for that reason, to keep things firmly on a last-name basis. But I relented during one of your periods of despair. And you read into my letters some things that were not there. Remember, even in the printed medium it is your mind that controls what you see. Your censor has let through what it wanted to see and maybe even added some things of its own. I'm at your mercy. For all I know, you may be reading this letter as a passionate affirmation of love. I've added every reinforcement I know of to make sure the message comes through on a priority channel and is not garbled. I'm sorry to hear that you love me. I do not, repeat not, love you in return. You'll understand why, at least in part, when we get you out of there.

It will never work, Mr. Fingal. Give it up.

Apollonia Joachim

★ ★ ★

Fingal graduated first in his class. He had finished the required courses for his degree during the last long week after his letter from Apollonia. It was a bitter victory for him, marching up to the stage to accept the sheepskin, but he clutched it to him fiercely. At least he had made the most of his situation, at least he had not meekly let the wheels of the machine chew him up like a good worker.

He reached out to grasp the hand of the college president and saw it transformed. He looked up and saw the bearded, robed figure flow and writhe and become a tall, uniformed woman. With a surge of joy, he knew who it was. Then the joy became ashes in his mouth, which he hurriedly spit out.

"I always knew you'd choke on a figure of speech," she said, laughing tiredly.

"You're here," he said. He could not quite believe it. He stared dully at her, grasping her hand and

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the diploma with equal tenacity. She was tall, as the prophecy had said, and handsome. Her hair was cropped short over a capable face, and the body beneath the uniform was muscular. The uniform was open at the throat, and wrinkled. There were circles under her eyes, and the eyes were bloodshot. She swayed slightly on her feet.

"I'm here, all right. Are you ready to go back?" She turned to the assembled students. "How about it, gang? Do you think he deserves to go back?"

The crowd went wild, cheering and tossing mortarboards into the air. Fingal turned dazedly to look at them, with a dawning realization. He looked down at the diploma.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. Back to work at the data room?"

She clapped him on the back.

"No. I promise you that."

"But how could it be different? I've come to think of this piece of paper as something . . . real. Real! How could I have deluded myself like that? Why did I accept it?"

"I helped you along," she said. "But it wasn't all a game. You really did learn all the things you learned. It won't go away when you return. That thing in your hand is imaginary, for sure, but who do you think prints the real ones? You're registered where it counts—in the computer—as having passed all the courses. You'll get a real diploma when you return.

Fingal wavered. There was a tempting vision in his head. He'd been here for over a year and had never really exploited the nature of the place. Maybe that business about dying in the memory bank was all a shuck, another lie invented to keep him in his place. In that case, he could remain here and satisfy his wildest desires, become king of the universe with no opposition, wallow in pleasure no emperor ever imagined. Anything he wanted here he could have, anything at all.

And he really felt he might pull it off. He'd noticed many things about this place, and now had the knowledge of computer technology to back him up. He could squirm around and evade their attempts to erase him, even survive if they removed his cube by programming himself into other parts of the computer. He could do it.

With a sudden insight he realized that he had no desires wild enough to keep him here in his navel. He had only one major desire right now, and she was slowly fading out. A lap-dissolve was replacing her with the old college president.

"Coming?" she asked.

"Yes." It was as simple as that. The stage, president, students, and auditorium faded out and the computer room at Kenya faded in. Only Apollonia remained constant. He held onto her hand until everything stabilized.

"Whew," she said, and reached around behind her head. She pulled

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out a wire from her occipital plug and collapsed into a chair. Someone pulled a similar wire from Fingal's head, and he was finally free of the computer.

Apollonia reached out for a steaming cup of coffee, on a table littered with empty cups.

"You were a tough nut," she said. "For a minute I thought you'd stay. It happened once. You're not the first to have this happen to you, but you're no more than the twentieth. It's an unexplored area. Dangerous."

"Really?" he said. "You weren't just saying that?"

"No," she laughed. "Now the truth can be told. It *is* dangerous. No one had ever survived more than three hours in that kind of cube, hooked into a computer. You went for six. You *do* have a strong world-picture."

She was watching him to see how he reacted to this. She was not surprised to see him accept it readily.

"I should have known that," he said. "I should have thought of it. It was only six hours out here, and more than a year for me. Computers think faster. Why didn't I see that?"

"I helped you not see it," she admitted. "Like the push I gave you not to question why you were studying so hard. Those two orders worked a lot better than some of the orders I gave you."

She yawned again, and it seemed to go on forever.

"See, it was pretty hard for me to interface with you for six hours straight. No one's ever done it before, it can get to be quite a strain. So we've both got something to be proud of."

She smiled at him but it faded when he did not return it.

"Don't look so hurt, Fingal . . . what *is* your first name? I knew it, but erased it early in the game."

"Does it matter?"

"I don't know. Surely you must see why I haven't fallen in love with you, though you may be a perfectly lovable person. I haven't had *time*. It's been a very long six hours. but it was still only six hours. What can I do?"

Fingal's face was going through awkward changes as he absorbed that. Things were not so bleak after all.

"You could go to dinner with me."

"I'm already emotionally involved with someone else, I should warn you of that."

"You could still go to dinner. You haven't been exposed to my new determination. I'm going to really make a case."

She laughed warmly and got up. She took his hand.

"You know, it's possible that you might succeed. Just don't put wings on me again, all right? You'll never get anywhere like that."

"I promise. I'm through with visions—for the rest of my life." ★

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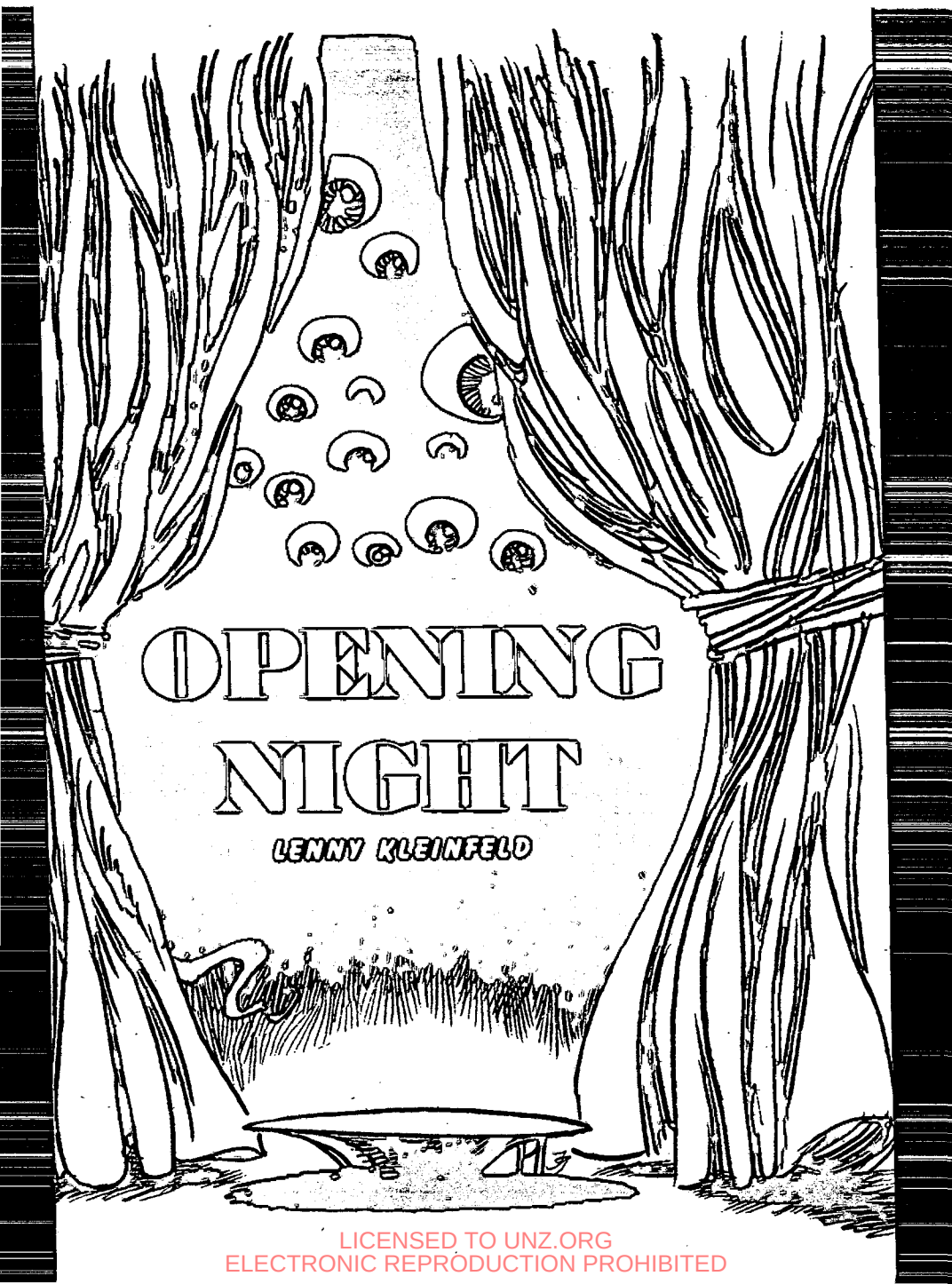

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All the universe loves a lover!

—

LOOK, I WOULD NEVER have left the video recorder on if I didn't think you'd enjoy it. . .well I'm telling you *now*. I mean, if I was really a bastard I would never have said anything, right? Look, you enjoyed it, I enjoyed it, I could tell you were digging. . .sneaky, sure. . .face it, when you come home with the only heterosexual photographer's model on the West Side, you know he's got to be a little weird. You can *burn* the goddamn tape, I only did it, cause, y'see, I like—no, I *need* to have that camera peeping away or I can't manage. . .it sounds like bullshit but it's not. .no, I don't get off on petty fashionable decadence, I get off on you. You're the first person I've ever met who listens to and understands what I say. And everything about the way you make love says that you care. A lot. So if you'll stop screaming and put your clothes back on the floor where they belong, I'll tell you something I've never told anyone before—Christ, that sounds even more bullshit. That's how you know it's true.

Like most people in 1964, I was a virgin. Me, my best friend Ricky Obadiah, the rifle team, every girl in Sheepshead Bay High School, Peter Paul and Mary, the Pope, my mother, we were all virgins. The gym teacher and James Bond weren't. The people in those grainy black and white English films supposedly weren't, but sex always left them depressed so I knew they must be lying about having Done It. Like a friend of mine sometimes did.

Look, now we can smile and say that being a virgin isn't a crime, but you know damn well that at the time it's the worst felony imaginable. With a life sentence, at least. And neither masturbating nor pathological amounts of necking help.

So that summer I got a job as a bus boy at a big hotel in the Catskills.

The first month was dismal. My hottest physical thrills came when somebody's granny would try to stick a five in my pants pocket while I was stumbling past her table at high velocity carrying fourteen scalding bowls of *kreplach* soup on a bent tray. . .yeah, that actually happened.

In fact, one morning after they'd had an animal act in the night club, the trainer showed up for breakfast at my station accompanied by a fully dressed female chimp on roller skates. Big deal—she was only four, smoked cigars, and had a tendency to bite. Not my type. Neither was the waitress I worked with. She kept asking if I loved her. I kept saying yes. She kept

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saying no. I won't entertain you with the details.

But then. . .

Then there was Barbara. From New Jersey. With blond streaks in her hair, a job as a hostess in the cocktail lounge, and, most importantly, a pair of Jersey license plates wrapped around a baby blue Le Mans convertible. Oooh.

It was well into August, but I'd never seriously considered asking her out, because she spent all of her time with rich customers, the tennis instructor, and other grownups. But I'd already come on to every non-granny in the place, so, in a fatalistic mood—I think it was a joint, two beers, and a Jack Daniels—I, um, sorta, gulped-and-asked-her-for - a - date - in - one- quick - barely-audible-breath.

She said, "What?"

I shrugged and examined the carpeting.

She said, "It's too noisy to talk in here. Why don't you meet me after work tomorrow night and we'll go for a drive or something?"

Look, that may not sound very titillating to you, but for the next 24 hours her one little "or something" kept me in a fever of speculation bordering on insanity. Shit. If only what happened had lived down to my drably pornographic fantasies. If only someone had had the decency to slash her tires before we could leave the hotel. . .well, tonight I wouldn't have needed my friend Sony watching us in order to, ah, add the final touch to the excitement of your being here.

So we're in the Le Mans, it's dark out like it only gets dark on hilly country roads, and why don't we just park and talk cause she's not that hungry and is tired of pizza anyway. She "discovers" a dirt track and pulls off the road. About a mile and a half. Me and Barbara and the Le Mans snuggled behind a little rise in one end of a pasture. This is definitely a full-color American movie.

I take a deep breath, slide down in the seat, let my head flop casually in her direction, and say. . .nothing. Lungs bone dry. Brain too. Barbara smiles sweetly, sympathetically, and slides down in her seat, deeply concerned at the prospect of spending a warm night in the middle of nowhere with a paralytic.

Nose to nose, she says, "Till last night you hadn't said a word to me all summer. I thought you didn't like me."

I giggle.

"I love listening to you talk, like when you were telling the bartender about Hamlet it was really really funny."

I shrug and fling my hands out in a gesture of humility, belting her in the chest.

She is too amazed by the pain to make a sound.

"Barbara, are you okay, it was an accident, I'm sorry. . .does it still hurt?" And I reach out to touch —strictly a comforting gesture, and

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she shrieks "NO!" and jerks back into the steering wheel, inspiring the Le Mans to let out a nasty, condescending Gerneral Motors honk.

Barbara bounces off the horn, sits very still, slowly breathing herself into control.

"I'm really truly sorry, Barbara. Not just about hitting you, I mean grabbing like that, it was just an instinct, you know? I mean I couldn't help it, I was trying to help, I would never have hit you in the boo—breast in order to have an excuse to grab it."

"I believe you," she whispers. "Ever make it in a convertible?"

"No, I've never made it—in a convertible."

She slips into the back seat while somehow leaving her dress in the front seat. "It's got a lot of hooks and stuff that guys can never open without tearing something. No offense." No offense. I touch her thigh. She grins and closes her eyes. I run a hand up her leg. I rub against her and she licks around my ear. She trails her hand across the back of my leg. I slide her bra up over her breasts. She reaches behind me and. . .and, and—

The flying saucer lands.

Yeah, a *flying saucer*. It looks like a sandwich made out of two World War I helmets except it's black, with a dull sheen, and it makes no sound except for this tiny *beep-beep-beeping* as if it's coyly answering the mating call of the Le Mans. To this day I'm convinced it was that damn honk that attracted those invisible shit-heads. Well, I can't say for sure that they're invisible, just that I never saw one.

What I did see was a thick, flexible black tube extrude itself from the underside of the hull—why didn't we run away? For one thing, we're still rapturously tangled up in each other, wedged into the back bench of Barbara's pastel love-mobile. For another, the attention of my nervous and muscular systems is focused entirely on pacifying my bladder, which is threatening to cut loose like a busted water balloon. They say you discover profound truths about your inner soul during catastrophes, moments of mortal danger; I discovered that I'd risk death rather than break toilet training. Look, it doesn't sound impressive, but in fact it's a character trait shared only by Old Testament prophets, great generals, and me.

Where were we—yeah, the creepy black tube. It gets about one foot in front of us and three feet over our heads, and stops. Now the end unpuckers and this *flower*, sort of a feathery red tulip, quivers out. Barbara suggests that I throw her dress over the tulip and keep it distracted while she jumps into the front and starts the car. I respectfully decline, and explain that any civilization advanced enough to build a flying machine of this sophistication couldn't possibly be into the wanton slaughter of friendly

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teenage aliens. Hamlet, I assure her, would simply raise an open hand in the universal gesture of peace. You first, she declares in her smugly realistic way. I relinquish her behind and raise my hand about a half-inch over my shoulder. The tulip rotates slowly towards us. The petal-feathers flex. An exhilirating perfume washes gently over us. We hear a softly swelling, otherworldly melody, the sugary keenings of castrati computers. Barbara smiles winningly and raises her hand. The tulip lunges and bites it. She howls horribly and collapses.

I cunningly attempt to save myself by shoving my hand into my pocket, but the tulip's reflexes are better than mine and what I feel as I'm going under, screaming, is someone pouring Drano down my spinal cord. Look, those space cowboys may have peachy-keen flying saucers, but I can tell you their tranquilizer guns leave a great deal to be desired. You never see Marlin Perkins putting a Thompson's gazelle through those kinds of changes. And that turned out to be the friendly part of their act.

When I came to I was lying on the slightly squishy floor of a seamless, egg-shaped, dark gray room, and a disembodied voice was reading me a contract.

" 'Whereas the sentient of the first part is deemed sufficiently lobed and glanded under the Trans-Spectral Convention, sub-

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paragraph X11.7[3], the sentient of the second part may tender a standard Sub-Diplomatic particle transmission agreement, pursuant to the limitations of the Voluntary Enmeshment Code for Non-Member Planets. He, she, it, or they may signify and bind by verbal, chemical, or radiational submission of personal name, spectra, registration, or metaphor.' You may now signify your comprehension of our offer and bind your acceptance by stating your name."

"Huh?" I shot back.

"It's the deal of a lifetime, kid. We're not the kind of outfit that takes advantage of unsuspecting natives. But we do have our problems. We can't afford to spend too much time in a sector as barren as this, so you've got to give us an answer right away."

"Huh," said I, quoting that historic first comment from an earthling to a starling.

"It's only a basic release form. No entanglements, no extensions or options involved. A crew from the Guarneri Cluster will probably track us here within three or four unit's time, but those cheap *freks* will offer you less, not more. We're the only organization that can carry out an operation on this scale and get every detail perfect, all the way down the ellipse."

"I want Barbara. What have you done with Barbara?" I was not showing any heroic concern for her welfare. My terror had subsided just enough for me to realize that I'd prefer being terrified with company.

"You mean the female. She's giving us a hard time too. All we're asking is that you participate in a simple examination in exchange for the standard—but generous—examination fee. All the best races have consented."

Examination. The word reverberated in my stomach with disgusting overtones of karmic revenge: my repayment for mutilating untold numbers of frogs in order to pass Biology.

"I was only following orders," I blurted out.

"Huh?" the disembodied voice replied.

"I don't wanna talk any more unless you bring Barb—the female in here right now."

"Certainly. The only reason we seperated you was that our preliminary survey showed that it's a species-wide habit of yours to conduct business matters secretly, in a dark room. Now that you've agreed to cooperate, do you mind if we turn up the—"

"Hey! I haven't ag—" An opening zipped down one curved wall in a perfect imitation of a run down a stocking, and Barbara stepped through. I started towards her, then froze. "You're naked," I pithily observed.

"So are you," she pithed right back at me. Indeed I was. I had been so busy being scared I hadn't noticed what I wasn't wearing. Bar-

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bara rushed over and wrapped herself around me, sobbing lightly. It was wonderful. The spasmodic sway of flesh across my flesh reminded me I'd been *that close* when we'd been kidnapped by a flying saucer with a disembodied voice. This was worse than terrifying. It was grossly unfair.

"This is grossly unfair," I shouted.

"This is what you requested," the voice whined. "We've brought the two of you together. Now if you'd only help us get on with the vital work of promoting intergalactic communication and understanding. . ."

"Can we have our clothes back?" whimpered Barbara.

"Never mind that now," I forcefully declared. "Let's get this over with. Will you release us unharmed if we cooperate?"

"Harmed? You misjudge us completely. Stand to one side, please." We did, and a section of floor squooshed up and shaped itself into an immense table. "Here's how it works. We read you the applicable subsection of the T.S. Convention. You say your names out loud. Then you place yourselves on the examination table, we conduct the examination, and it is transmitted, live, to trillions of viewplexes on tens of thousands of planets belonging to countless species, sub-species, and mutants. A noble and absolutely painless gesture on your part on behalf of universal co-consciousness. For which you'll be handsomely rewarded."

"And, um, if we'd rather not?" I asked.

"We'll return you to your planet as soon as possible."

Barbara's sobbing ended abruptly. "What do you mean return? What do you mean as soon as possible?"

"We had to get a few light-units away from your star to enhance the clarity of the transmission. Technical reasons."

"Well, how long will it take to get back?"

"That's hard to say," said the voice with cosmic insincerity. You could imagine it scratching its head and trying to look dumb, supposing it had a head. "We've just received word that our primary drive has developed a *quirdle*. Average *quirdles* can be cleared up in a matter of five to ten minutes, our time. Unfortunately, that's a few centuries, your time. Make yourselves comfortable, and don't hesitate to borrow from our large library of philosophical and scientific literature."

"You can't do this!" I screeched.

"You win, when do we start," Barbara said with utter calm.

"Right away, right away—what's this? Good news. Our computers report that it was only a ghost *quirdle*, a mere mathematical anomaly we can rectify with a quick push on the Erase button."

"No shit," Barbara muttered. At

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that instant I fell extravagantly in love with her; I had no idea that anybody could simultaneously be so naked and so rational. Now of course I know it's a faculty women are born with and men develop only by being repeatedly dropped on their heads. But at the time—wow. So you can imagine how impressed I was when the next thing she piped up with was: "How much do we get?"

"One artifact apiece from the most advanced technosynthesizer known. If you can think of it, we can make it. Relax, hold up your end of the bargain, and when you're done, name anything and it's yours."

Barbara and I broke our clinch and stared at each other. It was kind of obvious that if we stalled any longer our friends' primary drive would immediately throw another piston. I stammered out a resigned Yes. The voice recited its legal sludge and we recited our names. It told us to get up on the table. We did. It was the same consistency as the floor, but warmer. The room grew uncomfortably bright.

"Studio lights, you'll get used to them in no time," the voice assured us. "Get ready. Ninety of your seconds till transmission."

"Uh, exactly what happens?"

"We ask you one question and you answer. Just be careful to keep insides the edges of the table, as they define the limits of the particle field we're projecting."

"*One* question?"

"There's only one question worth asking. Remember, we represent the most advanced life-forms in the universe. Sixty seconds."

"What's—" I started to say, when Barbara grabbed my arm and hissed. "Don't ask."

"I'm curious. What's the question?"

" 'How does your race express love?' "

"Hell, I can never think of what to say when I really like a girl. You should have asked—" Barbara cut me off with a playful punch in the kidney.

"Don't be silly," the voice scolded. "Thirty seconds. You don't say a thing. You show us. You're legally obligated, you know."

Barbara deftly slipped her hand over my eyes and her tongue in my ear. "Shh," she moaned. "It'll be even better this way."

"Ten seconds."

Through all the agonizing days and nights of my pubescence I swore I'd do anything to get laid, but. . .*transmitted live to trillions of viewplexes on tens of thousands of planets belonging to countless species, sub-species, and mutants?*

Well, you've gotta start somewhere.

"You're on! . . .Greetings, sentients. We know you must be wondering why your 'plexies have been debited for triple the usual deep space reception fee. You shall see

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and feel the reason soon enough. For the first time we penetrate the remotest far-flung spiral of an unexplored barbarian galaxy, a cauldron of steaming primitive lust the likes of which has not been experienced for eons! These proud creatures, royal offspring of the United Statsians, the galaxy's most orgasmic tribe, will give their uniquely violent response to the Fundamental Query: 'How does your race screw?' "

If what happened to me in the Le Mans was paralysis, what occurred in the saucer can only be described as rigor mortis. Granite stiffness everywhere but in the crucial organ.

"Hang in there. This will help," the voice whispered. Four of the black tubes popped out of the ceiling, tulips rampant, spraying a tangy gas.

By the end of the first breath, we both came down with a case of the Uncontrollable Giddies, followed swiftly by the Flashing Feelies: I could feel all the way through Barbara, feel those zillions of *things* watching, and it was all bliss, touching, touching, a litany of touchness, Barbara, millions of mutants, Barbara, millions of mutants. . .sweating, snorting, we slid up and down each other in as mindless a frenzy as you could possibly ask for. Then. . .it happened. That's right, there are god knows how many intelligent eggplants out there licking their roots and waiting to get their jollies off of us steaming barbarians, and I can't wait. Don't ever tell me you know what it means to be embarrassed.

Barbara, however, was determined to be back in the Catskills by morning, and she wasn't going to let a minor detail like my teenage overeagerness stop her. In a brief but extraordinarily pleasant time I was fully operational, and the rest is broadcasting history. Somewhere.

After the show one side of the table dissolved and we found our clothing inside—someone had even been considerate enough to retrieve Barbara's dress from the car. As we covered our nakedness our little Garden of Eden sunk back into the floor. I was still suffering from a residual euphoria induced by the combination of extra-terrestial dope and my boundless love for Barbara, and would have been content to stand there for hours, holding hands and gazing retardedly into her eyes. She got fidgety and started pacing.

"You kids certainly showed a lot of. . .promise," the voice suddenly boomed into the room. "A high-powered operation like ours just might be able to tap your potential and turn you into great artists. Wealthy artists. All you have to do is signify and bind a long-term—"

"Forget it!" Barbara snapped. "You promised to pay up and put us back."

"Yeah," I added. I took the opportunity to slip a protective arm around Barbara's fragile shoulders.

A silence.

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Barbara resolutely folded her arms. "I'm waiting."

"Oh all right. It's your future to waste as you see fit. The Code forbids us to synthesize any implement of mass destruction or anything else which would cause a major socio-economic upheaval. Within those parameters you may have any artifact you wish. You're being very shortsighted, you know."

Barbara pulled away from me. "You first," she insisted with a cagey twinkle in her eyes. Here it was: the first test of our new-found love. I was determined to rise to the occasion.

"I want an 11 × 14 color photograph of the two of us, nude, and kissing—with our eyes shut."

"You're crazy!" she yelled.

"I wouldn't let anyone else see it, I swear. Hey, can you guys make it so that anyone else but Barbara and I who touched it would—would. . .disappear!"

The voice chuckled. "No problem. We impregnate the paper with a magnetic bond-destabilizer keyed to warm-blooded animals. The destabilizing agent will be coded so that your two spectra-patterns will neutralize it."

A slot opened in the floor and the picture popped out. It was very clear. I offered it to Barbara, who looked at it for a second, sighed, kissed me, and said, "You're so bizarre."

"Why don't you ask them to make you a copy?"

"Because I think I'd prefer a certificate for ten thousands shares of AT&T. How about it, Voice?"

"What's an AT&T?" The voice sounded genuinely perplexed. "Describe it in detail, or tell us where we can find a computer net we can penetrate and squeeze a duplicate out of."

"Wall Street, New York City—the Stock Exchange. Can you find that?"

"Are you kidding? Our computers even found *you*. As a matter of fact, they've already identified your artifact, and inform me that while it is allowable under the Code, it is not advisable. The multipathic logic cicuit insists that there will be no way for you to explain such an acquisition to your Securities and Exchange Commission, your Internal Revenue Service, or your mother."

"I can't help it if my mother has a filthy mind!"

"Neither can we. You'd best choose again."

"Dammit. . .if I pick anything really valuable my mother is going to find out and give me a hard time. . .what should I do?"

"The Code forbids us to make suggestions," the voice said.

"You could get a picture of us in a different position," I offered.

She started pacing again, punched the wall, bit her lip, and got down to basics. "Okay, I give in. No cash. Make me a pill that ensures I'll never have crow's feet, stretch marks, or varicose veins."

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"Easy as π," the voice responded. "In fact, if you'll get back on the examination table, we can treat you sonically. You won't feel a thing."

"No chance," Barbara sneered. "Any payment I take from you sharks I want to feel, see, *and* hear."

A slim pedestal grew out of the floor in front of her. On it was a bright green capsule. It was buzzing raucously.

"The sound stops after you swallow it," came the smarmy voice.

"Can I have a glass of water to wash it down?"

"Sorry, your contract states specifically that only one artifact may be given."

I hope it's working. I haven't seen her since that summer. One of those sadistic tulips nipped me on the ass, and by the time the pain subsided we were in the car, about dawn, chilly, soaked in dew. Barbara informed me that if word of this ever got out to anyone, like *anyone,* I was on her shit list for life. She'd have me put right in a loony bin, just for starters. I asked her if that meant she didn't want to go out with me again. She patted my cheek and told me that I was very sweet, and very perceptive.

So that's how I got to be. . .this way. My sex life has been a matter of what they see is what I get. Oh, at first it was enough to leave the lights on. Then the shades had to be up. Then. . .well, you can imagine how hard it is to find a third party who's willing to sit and watch, at whatever hour I happen to score, even if it is easier these days to find a second party who's willing to be watched. Luckily, I met a cybernetics major at N.Y.U. who was determined to find out why I was avoiding her bedroom. I confessed about needing an audience, she laughed and said she knew where she could borrow a video deck. What followed was the best semester of my life. But cybernetics majors inevitably graduate and find high-paying gigs in faraway places.

The Sony was her parting gift, my means for leading a somewhat normal life. As long as the lens is pointed my way and the little red light is on. . .aw, c'mon, what motive could I possibly have for making up. . . .if I *did* tell a psychiatrist he'd have me sealed in a padded cell or exiled to Los Angeles. . .what? . . .hey, I wouldn't call you names like that if you had an emotional disability. . .wait a minute—don't rush out, I have proof! Just hold on, it's in this drawer somewhere. .now, if you're such a puritan and I'm such a pervert, what's this? I'll tell you what it is. It's a picture of me and Barbara—*the* picture. See, we've got our eyes closed and everything, and—don't do that! For chrissakes stop grabbing at it you'll. .

. . .oops. . .

Look, at least I've got you on tape. ★

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Spider Robinson

The Stochastic Man, Robert Silverberg, Harper, 229 pp., $7.95

Growing Up In Tier 3000, Felix C. Gotschalk, Ace, 158 pp., $1.25

Killerbowl, Gary K. Wolf, Doubleday, 162 pp., $5.95

Orbit 17, ed. Damon Knight, Harper, 218 pp., $7.95

The Science Fiction Roll of Honor, ed. Fred Pohl, Random House, 264 pp., $8.95

Alternate Worlds, James Gunn, Prentice Hall, 256 pp., $29.95

The Science Fiction Book, Franz Rottensteiner, Seabury, 160 pp., $14.95

North By 2000, M.A. Hargreaves, Peter Martin Assoc., 160 pp., price unknown

The Invincible, Stanislaw Lem, Ace, 223 pp., $1.25

The Spacejacks, Robert Wells, Berkley, 186 pp., 95¢

Space Cadet, Robert A. Heinlein, Ace, 221 pp., $1.25

Great Stories of Space Travel, ed. Groff Conklin, Tempo, 256 pp., $1.25

Voyagers In Time, ed. Robert Silverberg, Tempo, 208 pp., $1.25

* * *

THERE IS SO goddam much pessimism in science fiction these days that I'm about ready to believe it's hopeless.

(Jeez, that's the best lead I've had since "remember nostalgia?")

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Seriously (as opposed to "grimly"), as I write this column winter is coming on, up here in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley; I've got to find a new home and move into it; there ain't no firewood cut; and some of my best friends have been giving convincing imitations of enemies. A good editor just got fired, an advertiser bailed out of *Galaxy* partly because I dared appraise one of their books honestly, all the money I need to make it through the winter is owed me but not present, and what do I get to read for review? Hundreds of thousands of words of pessimism, of grotesque people and unpleasant situations and the Hairy Doom Around The Corner. It's enough to make a man start writing New Wave or someting.

F'rinstance:

* * *

Bob Silverberg's *The Stochastic Man* reminds me in at least one sense of John Brunner's *Shockwave Rider*. Both books began just brilliantly, had me convinced in the first third or half that I was reading a genuine masterpiece, and then kinda petered out. Like being left on the verge after some inspired foreplay, it hurts. It frustrates. It makes you irritable. You gossip maliciously to your girlfriends. Well let me tell *you* what that so-called stud Silverberg did to *me*, darling . . .

Stochasm (if that's the word) is the old if-you-had-enough-data-and-insight-you-could-predict-the-future wheeze. Isaac Asimov's "psychohistory" is an excellent example of the stochastic method, and his Hari Seldon is a stochastic man. Bester's John Strapp is another. Silverberg's Stochastic Man, Lew Nichols, is (Like Strapp) a chap who does this, more or less intuitively, for a living. He's a trendpredicter in the world of 1990's America, a man who eats Gallup polls and spits predictions, a man who guesses right. He's working for a policitian named Quinn, who might be the next President and *might* be the next Hitler. So far, great, with some superb writing.

In the course of his work for Quinn, Nichols meets Carvajal, a burnt-out old man who is an honest-to-god prophet—he literally sees the future, all the time. (The explanations of this are much too overdone and repetitious for anyone who's ever read any sf before, but let it pass). Carvajal has been shattered by the repeated vision of his own inevitable death, and no longer attempts to change the future he *sees*. He is utterly detached from Life, an actor endlessly repeating a script without a moral and which he did not write.

So Nichols, fascinated by this horrid gift, becomes a disciple of Carvajal, giving over his whole life to learning how to develop the same

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power. At Carvajal's direction he performs random and pointless actions, blowing in the process both his exceptionally fine marriage and his job with Quinn, because Carvajal's vision of the future says he must, and there's no point in struggling. If you resist the Flow, you can't perceive the Flow, right? The second half of *Stochastic Man* amounts to a sales pitch for predestination, and frankly the inducements don't sell *me*. Nichols's submission to hopeless determinism (against which he never once struggles, even experimentally) costs him everything that ever meant anything to him; Carvajal's brings him only the pointless life and absurd death he foresaw; and in the end, Nichols tells us that he is training and founding an academy of prophets like himself, who will, by virtue of being able to perceive a meaningless and inevitable future, "become like gods" somehow. Astonishingly, Nichols takes comfort in the belief that predestination is what Albert Einstein meant when he said that "God does not throw dice." *That*, he says, is why Jesus didn't whimper on the way to the Place of Skulls.

Phooey. I reject predestination so thoroughly and instinctively (as does Quinn, by the way) that I can't like Nichols or this book. I don't believe, (say,) that it *is* inevitable that New York will deteriorate to the point of universal city-wide rioting by New Year 2000. Possibly. Maybe even likely. But *not* inevitably. People *can* get smarter. Hell, we can up and throw out a President because he outrages our moral sense. We can even smarten up and save ourselves—if we put our minds to it. And you can shove B.F. Skinner up your behaviorally-conditioned. . . .

Gettin' a bit grumpy lately, aintcha, Bob?

* * *

Which connects, in a way, with why I don't like to read Felix C. Gotschalk, even though he's a fiendishly creative writer. I didn't like him when I first ran across him in a Dave Gerrold anthology whose name escapes me, I didn't like him in *New Dimensions 5*, I didn't like him in *Orbit 17* (of which more anon), and I don't like *Growing Up In Tier 3000* at all, in spite of the fact that there may be a pun in the title (that's okay, though—Gotschalk himself says in the flyleaf of the book that "If people 'like' what I write, fine—if they don't, it's no skin off my ass.").

Look, if you need me to tell you that the psychiatrist's and psychologist's view of mankind is bullshit, you're in serious trouble. If you haven't noticed by now how many of your friends have been "in therapy" for up to twenty years without getting any smarter, I can't help you. A priest who doesn't believe in the existence of the soul

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is a fool, and all the jargon in the world about Oedipal transfers and motive-tropisms and self-worth-vectors and homeostatic endocrine balance don't explain Mahler's Symphony of a Thousand.

Well, the hell of this thing I have with Gotschalk is that I *think* he agrees with me. I *think* that his extrapolations of modern pyschiatric jargon and what Silverberg calls "technology-speak" into a future world wherein a lover "wove a complex pattern of friction vectors into the coitional matrix" and children take fifty milligrams of amphetamine with every breakfast are *meant* to be nightmare glimpses of the ghastly Brave New World we could forge ourselves if we ever decide to commit ourselves to cultural belief in that crap. And in *spite* of that, I can't stand reading Gotschalk.

I don't *like* wading in and dining on crap, even to make the point that it's undesirable, and I find virtually everything Gotschalk writes too flat-out unpleasant to read. Now dig it: he writes brilliantly, just shotgun-spatters of pure creativity, superb erudition (he is, after all, a professional psychologist himself) and dazzling style—but his visions of a world in which literally every human value has been thrown out in the pursuit of "self-worth reinforcement" and sensory satisfaction are *so* chilling, *so* disgusting, *so* horrific, that they make my skin crawl.

Tier 3000 is the far-future refinement of that kind of cultural ethos—a world in which children customarily and inevitably murder their parents (with societal approval) at about puberty (that is, age 5); in which a telepathic fetus, jaded before birth, reports sourly on the taste of amniotic fluid and the boredom of intrauterine life in which humans (and I use the term advisedly) have been so supermanized by life-support, teleportation and telepathy implants as to become like angels, yet remind one of nothing so much as the demonic children of *Lord of the Flies*.

It's a warning—but one too obnoxious for me to heed, and one that I believe is unnecessary. I refuse to believe that the race as a whole could be that stupid, that grotesque, that inhuman. The only ones who need such a warning are those who really believe that modern psychiatry has discovered the Meaning of Life—and they'll be too stupid to understand the warning.

You might like Gotschalk—but if so, you oughta talk to your shrink about that masochism of yours.

* * *

Likewise Gary K. Wolf's *Killerbowl*.

Not that Wolf has even as much claim on your sf dollar as Gotschalk does. Wolf's writing is literate, in the sense that he can construct a

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sentence and place such sentences in coherent rows to tell a comprehensible story (which almost qualifies him as a godsend alongside some of the stuff I have to read in this racket).

But *Killerbowl* is a cheap rip-off of *Rollerball Murder*, another one of those books that deplores our senseless lust for violence by filling 162 pages with as much violence and bloodshed as they'll hold. Like *Rollerball, Killerbowl* (cripes, they even *sound* alike) has a "hero" who is top man in a sport that amounts to legalized murder, whose life is jeopardized by the hunger of his corporate bosses for more thrills, more blood, more violence. Rather than roller-derby with motorcycles, the "sport" here is "street football" with rifles, knives and clubs.

But Wolf's book is even more unlikely than the grim story and movie it copies, positing as it does that the murderous sport will be *so* universally and phenomenally popular that the producers can afford to evacuate a ten-by-two-city-block area in the heart of major cities all over the world to stage each game, and that virtually everyone in the world will go in hock up to their armpits to pay for endless instant replays of individual murders. In the end, the hero (named Mann—get it?) revolts against the system—not because his bosses have been playing God with his life for a profit, but because they haven't been as fair as God. Mann learns that selected players have radio-receivers secretly implanted in their skulls, and receive inside information from strategically-placed stooges in the pay of the producers. He exposes this heinous practice publicly, live-on-camera, in the Superbowl Game—and all the viewers in America write in to complain that Mann spoiled the game by "saying all those dopey things" instead of getting on with the murdering.

There are no Watergates in Wolf's universe, nor any moral or ethical people. There are no people. There is no hope. Just lots of blood.

Again, phooey.

* * *

Now for some optimism about pessimism (weirdest book-reviewer in the West, folks—wind him up and he produces a paradox).

I generally don't care for *Orbit* collections. Partly the pessimism gripe, and partly the opinion that too many *Orbit* stories get so "lit'ry" that they ignore bourgeois conventions like plot and story and characterization—so-called "New Wave" stuff. So I stopped buying and/or reading *Orbits* at about *Orbit 7* or *8*, a hiatus that lasted until I reviewed *Orbit 16* in these pages (well, pages much like these) a few months ago. You know, to this day I'm not sure how much of that review had to do with the book itself,

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and how much was a product of my feelings about the series in general. I can't even check back and see, because I gave my review copy away (my custom with books neither good enough to keep nor reprehensible enough to burn in my stove).

So I decided to give *Orbit 17* an especially careful reading, with a firm leash on my prejudice. I'm glad I made the effort.

Not that it's a Hugo-winner. By my usual method of anthology-evaluation, it rates only 54%—I only liked 7 of 13 stories. But of those 7, one and possibly two *are* Hugo-quality, two others are excellent, and the rest are quite good. Even the ones I didn't like or understand seemed honestly written—they might be right up your alley.

First off, let me nominate Jeff Duntemann's "The Steel Sonnets" for consideration for the Short Story Hugo. It is a fine story, concerning two explorer-robots, one of whom has been given, at enormous expense, the mechanical equivalent of a soul. He writes sonnets. The story is told from the viewpoint of his bodyguard, the robot that does *not* have a soul—or does he? Reminded me vaguely of *Of Mice And Men* (Of Mice And Metal Men?) The story was marvelously wrought, and I would like to see more of Mr. Duntemann.

Also excellent were "Toto, I Have A Feeling We're Not In

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Kansas Anymore,'' by Jeff Millar (the other Hugo possibility), an utterly hilarious re-working of the ''It's A *Good* Life'' theme; ''The Fun Palace,'' by Raylyn Moore, also hilarious (a funny story about bestiality? Sounds like P.J. Farmer); and ''The Anthropologist,'' by Kathleen M. Sidney, a heartbreaking story which, now that I think about it, has the same premise as *Stranger In A Strange Land*—only turned around 180 degrees. John Barfoot's ''House'' was a gentle, placid horror story of terrific impact, and Seth McEvoy's ''Which In The Wood Decays'' was all that *plus* an actual plot. Lafferty's ''Great Day In The Morning'' was typical Lafferty, reminding me as always of an old Irish barfly with a headful of acid. You know you shouldn't like Lafferty, but you do anyway.

The rest I didn't care for at all (though they showed talent), either because of the absence of plot, story, characters, and ending, or all of the above; or because they tried so assiduously to be grim or macabre that they ended up being literally unpleasant to read. For a change, Gotschalk's ''The Man With The Golden Reticulates'' did not fall into the latter category, but the story was largely incoherent and barely comprehensible. Oh yes, I did like most of Damon's editorial anecdote-fillers this time around, excepting the ''Memory Machine'' section.

So there you are. The good outweighs the bad in this collection, and if nothing else buy it for ''Steel Sonnets'' and ''Toto . . .''

* * *

So much for pessimism. Onward to a tasty anthology.

The Science Fiction Roll of Honor, edited by Fred Pohl, contains either stories or essays or (in Doc Smith's case) a novel excerpt from men who have been Guest of Honor at a Worldcon (a world sf convention, for you ignoramuses out there—the next one is in Kansas City and the Guest is Robert Heinlein), perhaps the highest honor in sf. Not every GoH is included, but some of the best are, and as a group all are adequately represented.

There's not much to say about this one—a clear 100% on the Spider Scale, and the only possible reason you could have for failing to purchase it (other than poverty, of course) is that you might have at least half to three-quarters of these stories already. It's got Poul's ''Kings Who Die,'' Campbell's immortal ''Who Goes There?'', Lester's classic ''The Monster,'' (remember George Expeto? God, what a rush) Heinlein's ''The Long Watch,'' Sturgeon's ''The Hurkle is a Happy Beast,'' and Isaac's ''The Last Question,'' which Isaac, in his introduction to Jim Gunn's *Alter-*

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nate Worlds (more of that anon, too) calls with characteristic modesty "the best science fiction short story ever published." Also represented are the late Jim Blish (God rest his soul and God damn the nicotine habit), Robert Bloch, Arthur Clarke,Lloyd Eshbach, Hugo Gernsback (dignum et justum est), Fritz Leiber, Willy Ley, Frank R. Paul, Doc Smith, and A. E. Van Vogt and the late E. Mayne Hull (God rest her soul too). Fred's Introduction and introductions are as always delightful and evocative.

Altogether a Best Buy.

* * *

Next a pair of books, similar in concept, widely different in execution: James Gunn's *Alternate Worlds—The Illustrated History of Science Fiction* and Franz Rottensteiner's *The Science Fiction Book—An Illustrated History*. Both are what is known in the trade as coffee-table books (out-sized, lotsa pictures), and to my mind Gunn's is an infinitely preferable purchase, despite the fact that it costs twice as much. (One of the rare pleasures of reviewing is receiving the occasional really great book such as this one you'd never have been able to afford yourself.)

James Gunn should need no introduction, but he's going to get one anyhow. Past president of the Science Fiction Writers of America (pronounced "sif-wa"), teacher (of sf, among other things) at U. of Kansas, lecturer, author of plays, screenplays, articles, verse and criticism, he is best known for his sf short stories, novels like *The Joy Makers, The Immortal* (basis for the T.V. show), *The Listeners* and collaborations with the likes of Jack Williamson. Gunn's illustrated history of sf is a real treat, crammed with spectacular pictures sandwiched by knowledgable and entertaining prose. I learned much about sf and its legendary writers and fans, was delighted by the hundreds of photos (many by the Master, Jay K. Klein) of virtually everyone in sf history, from Hugo Gernsback through Heinlein and Kornbluth to Joe Haldeman (so *that's* what Pangborn looks like!) and enjoyed the spectacular array of sf art through the ages. Lots of solid information, lots historical interest, lots juicy photos, all cohesively arranged in a chronological progression—plus a record of Isaac's hairstyles over a period of twenty years.

Franz Rottensteiner does need an introduction, but all I have is the jacket blurb that says he's "editor of the respected Austrian fanzine, *Quarber Merkur*." His illustrated history is *much* slimmer; contains a scattergun "collage" (An art directors' term meaning "disorderly heap") of half-excellent, half-worthless art; is not even vaguely ordered, chronologically or anylogically; and contains infinitely less

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written information, a good deal of which is wrong. There are no personal photos of writers, Stanislaw Lem is called "the greatest contemporary sf writer," (more of *him* anon, too) and Rottensteiner bends so far over backward to be "international" (a nominally laudable ambition) that he gives more space to German writer Herbert W. Franke than he does to Robert Heinlein. He has the ignorance to claim that "Theodore Sturgeon has merely adapted soap opera to science fiction, presenting schmaltz and tears rather than genuine feeling," dismissing Ted's enormous worldwide popularity and influence as "a sure indication of the emotional and sexual immaturity of the whole sf genre." (!) There's one page on fandom, with a 7-word glossary of fanspeak; altogether too many stills from bad sf movies; and the dumb [*Censored.-Ed.*] omitted to mention (in his Awards appendix) the winners of the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, which Gunn, bless him, did not (my own umbrage here may possibly have something to do with the fact that the co-winners for 1974 were Lisa Tuttle and myself, your humble book-reviewer). Oh yes—there's no Index.

Rottensteiner's book is for those who know nothing of sf, and want to think they do (without troubling to read all them stories and novels). You're welcome to my copy. Gunn's book could serve such people too, much more accurately, but it's also highly recommended for those who *do* know sf, and want to know more. *I* know it's too damned expensive. So go bug your local library—you can't have my copy.

A costly Best Buy.

* * *

I picked up *North By 2000*, by M.A. Hargreaves, with anticipation and hope, because it said it was "a collection of Canadian science fiction." Even finding out that it's a one-man collection, and that the one man is a Canadian-by-courtesy from New York, didn't deter me. After all, *I'm* a refugee from New York and America too, and it happens my agent is looking for a home for a collection of my own short stories (The Callahan's Place Series, and if you'd like to see it, send me letters—it's hard to sell a single-author collection and I can use the ammunition). So I read the book, and found it dandy.

Of the 6 stories in *North by 2000*, one was printed in the Dec. 1963 *New Worlds* and later anthologized, and four appeared in *New Writings In SF*, avatars 11, 17, 20 and 21. I wish to hell Hargreaves would submit stuff to American markets—we'd all have heard of him long ago. All these stories were at least good, and some (notably "Tangled Web" and "More Things On Heaven And

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Earth'') were just terrific, genuine tours de force. Hargreaves reminds me a little of Poul Anderson, and a little of Silverbob, writing thoughtfully and literately about the problems of extremely real human characters—a knack in short supply these days. I should also mention that the book's design and interior art by Tim Wynne-Jones are striking, displaying much more thought and effort than most Americans put into their books.

Let us be realistic. The chances of your finding a book of Canadian sf by a writer unknown in America from a publisher called Peter Martin Associates in your local bookstore are negligible. The chance that the bookstore will be able to successfully order it is also vanishingly small. Therefore, I pass on the flyleaf information that *North by 2000* can be ordered from Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 35 Britain Street, Toronto, Canada M5A 1R7; from Books Canada, 1 Bedford Rd., London N2, England; or from Books Canada, 33 East Tupper St., Buffalo, N.Y. 14203 if you happen to be an American (there is no truth to the rumor that I'm praising this book to lay the groundwork for a Canada Council Arts Grant once I get my Landed Immigrant status finalized). I'm sorry I can't tell you the price, as my review copy inexplicably had the price clipped off the corner of the dust-jacket—but I can tell you it's worth the effort to find out.

C'mon, Prof. Hargreaves—send something to *Galaxy*.

* * *

I've been hearing about Stanislaw Lem for some time, and although every furrin'-sf translation I've ever read has bored the pants off me, I decided high praise from Ursula K. LeGuin could not be gainsaid. So I tried *The Invincible*—and found it entirely vincible.

I can't honestly review the book as a whole, or Lem—I didn't finish *Invincible*. But I *can* review the translation, which kept me from finishing it despite my standard three-fair-tries: it bored the pants off me. It's a translation of a translation, actually—the Polish original was translated into German, then re-translated for Ace's ''Special'' line by Wendayne Ackerman, who is responsible for most of those Perry Rhodan infections. I don't know about the Polish-German translator, who receives no credit in the Ace version, but Ms. Ackerman obviously translated literally, word by word, with the aid of a twenty-year-old German-English dictionary. The prose stumbles and then falls flat on its face, never to rise again, and the characters act and react incomprehensibly. I simply lost interest.

Some of it appears to be Lem's fault, too. For instance, the starship *Invincible* is commanded by her

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astrogator Horpach, which seems odd. Further, Rohan, who does most of the actual bossing (as opposed to Horpach's policy-making), is told on p. 20 that the atmosphere of the new planet *Invincible* has landed on is "nitrogen 78%, argon 2%, carbon dioxide zero, methane 4%, the rest is oxygen," and, making a lightning mental calculation (displaying brains), asks at once, "Oxygen sixteen percent? Are you sure?"—Rohan is struck only by the presence of so much oxygen on a lifeless world. And yet four pages later, when the identical information is given him by Horpach, he realizes at once that 4% methane and 16% oxygen is "an explosive mixture" that should have blown up the whole planet when *Invincible*'s jets first struck atmosphere (oh yeah?), and he does not appear to notice that he missed something the last time around.

It may be that the book as a whole contains some startling and revolutionary *ideas*, and sf is often said to be the literature of ideas, so maybe Lem is as good as he's cracked up to be. But the lifeless translation kept me from finishing more than a third of this book, and the ideas in that third were unoriginal, stereotyped and dull. Besides, as a certain editor once told me, "Ideas are a dime a dozen. It's good *writing* I buy."

Me too. *Invincible* is titanic—in the same sense that the *Titanic* was invincible.

* * *

Okay—my welcome is threadbare. Four minireviews and you can go.

The Spacejacks by Robert Wells also read like a second-hand translation from the Polish (only it ain't) and I didn't finish it either. Again, there may be some decent ideas here, but I just couldn't follow it.

Heinlein's *Space Cadet* is a bonafide Heinlein juvenile—'nuff said. If you don't have it, get it.

Likewise *Great Stories of Space Travel*, one of Groff Conklin's countless impeccable anthologies, and *Voyagers In Time*, one of Silverberg's solidest. Both are umpteenth editions (original copyrights 1963 and 1967 respectively) of often-anthologized classics of sf. Only one or two stories were unfamiliar to me, but all were a pleasure to read or re-read. A couple are Hugo-winners, most are standard classics—if you don't have 'em, get 'em. Best buys for the neofan, with the slight edge to Silverberg's collection. (It's weird that some of the best books I review get only a mini—but what can I do, when most of you already have them?)

I know last month I promised you the story of A.E. Van Vogt and the naked blonde in Halifax, but I've run out of room. You'll just have to come back again next month. ★

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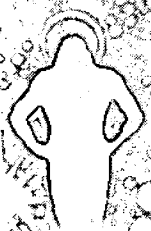

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HARRY WALDENSILL WAS SITTING in his cheesy apartment, reading a Theodore Sturgeon novel, when God appeared before him in the middle of the living room.

There was an uncomfortable pause as Harry squirmed in his absurdly comfortable arm-chair, wondering what to say. (There was no need for introductions, of course. When God appears in your living-room, you *know* it. Devine Revelation.)

"Uh . . . hi there," Harry stammered at last. "I was just reading about you."

God smiled. Wouldn't you?

"Appropriate," he said, in a voice that sounded . . . like a voice.

There was another uncomfortable pause. God's eyes seemed to glaze slightly, and Harry agonized as the seconds dragged by. *He's dead,* came the wild thought, followed closely by mortal terror.

"Hello?" he ventured.

God shook His head slightly. "Sorry," He said sheepishly. "Pretty thing happening out in the Horse Nebula. Got hung up."

Harry nodded absently.

God harrumphed. "Now then, Harold Waldensill . . ."

"No sir, it's just Harry," Harry said automatically, and then wished he could bite off his tongue.

"What's that?" asked God, Who hates to be interrupted.

"Sorry God, I didn't mean to cut you off. It's just that most guys named Harry are really Harold, but I'm not. I mean that's what my father put on the birth certificate: 'Harry.' I mean, I . . . he didn't . . ." He trailed off.

"Yes," said God very gently. "Now then, *Harry,* I've got a very momentous announcement to make to you."

"You gonna come out for birth-control?" Harry burst out. "Hey man, you gonna make *dope legal*?"

Harry suddenly found himself hip-deep in shit. He subsided. So did the shit.

"Pay attention, mungle-bungle. This is serious. This is cosmic. This is the single most important event in history. I am going to make you God."

Harry swallowed.

Harry swallowed again.

He blinked three times fast.

He opened his mouth and closed it again, twice.

"Why me?" he managed at last.

"Because," God said brightly, "I calculate that you are dumb enough to do it."

Harry considered that for a long time, while poor memories of inaccurate renderings of various nebulae ran across the top of his mind, and a snake-dance of naked ladies slithered along the underside.

"Yes," he said finally, "I think you're right. I can't *wait* to see the catch."

"No catch," God insisted. "Square deal all the way. I propose to give you the works: omnipo-

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tence, omniscience, the whole deal. Forever, or until you can find yourself another sucker."

"And if I misuse it I go to Hell, right?" said Harry with the weary cynicism of the longtime science-fiction fan.

"Don't tempt me, Harry," God said drily. "I don't have to go through with this. Now listen, schnook, how can you go to Hell if you're God? There doesn't have to *be* a Hell if you don't want one. I find it handy myself, but I'm told others did just fine without one."

"Others?" Harry interrupted nervously. "High turnover?"

"Eternity's a long time," God replied.

"Yeah, I suppose. But listen, you mean if I want, I can go on being God forever? No punishment if I do something bad?"

"You *define* bad, dullard. If you want the whole universe to be a giant vagina and you a phallus, and that by you is good, *that's good.*" He shuddered. "It's been done."

"I mean . . . I mean," Harry stammered, "I mean I could straighten out all the things that are messed up in this world?"

"If you want to bother with this one, you're welcome to try. But you'll have an infinity of time and worlds to tinker with."

"Will I be able to understand that?" Harry asked seriously.

"And work with it," God nodded.

"Holy shit," said Harry.

"If by you that's good," God agreed sadly.

"Wait," said Harry, having located a last loophole. "What about you? Do we share, or what?" Infinity seemed suddenly cramped.

"Oh, I'm retiring, didn't I say? Matter of fact, I'm going to go become a redwood in California for awhile, and die when the redwoods do. You can fall by for advice, if you like, before you scrap this universe and build another. Which you can do this afternoon if it suits you; it's all the same to me. But I would recommend that you fiddle with this one first, to sort of get the feel of it."

"Oh, by all means," Harry agreed abstractedly. He steepled his hands, then separated them. "Well," he said firmly, "no sense stalling. Do it."

And God did it.

* * *

Harry Waldensill took the subway out to Queens to see His old lady, Janet. The subway was immaculately clean. The patrons were few, but universally pleasant and amiable. They met Harry's eyes without flinching, and the children were well-behaved. After a noiseless, painless journey, Harry was decanted onto Woodside Avenue, where cheerful taxi-drivers exchanged polite conversation with smiling pedestrians while waiting out a traffic jam that was even now straightening out.

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"This," thought Harry. "I could learn to live with. This is gonna take a little getting used to. I can see that right now."

Six cabs cut smoothly through traffic in response to Harry's raised hand. The driver of the fourth in line offered to haul Him for free, "seeing as how there's already some people in the cab and it ain't exactly the whole cab available for hire." The passengers, two Negroes who were not going anywhere near Harry's way, protested that He would be perhaps too cramped, and offered to find themselves other accomodations. But Harry waved away their embarassment and slid into the cab.

As the hack eased gracefully into city traffic, Harry regarded His two companions with a growing confidence. "You know," He said, "perhaps you can help me. There's something I've wondered for a long time, and now that I'm in a position to do something about it . . . well, what I want to ask is, er . . . What exactly is it that you people want?"

The two young black men looked away uneasily, and Harry sighed (as Gods had done before Him) and *looked* into their hearts, and what he saw there shook Him so badly that He hardly noticed reaching His destination and getting out.

He snapped out of it when a passing flower-child kissed Him on the lips, right in the middle of the sidewalk. Pondering on *that* one, Harry stumbled into the apartment lobby and paused, bewildered, in front of the panel which contained two hundred and twenty-four door buzzers. He could somehow never manage to remember even in which quadrant Janet's buzzer-button lay, and they were in no especial order, either by name or apartment number. Cursing, He hunted—then straightened up with a grin.

"I sure am slow today," He muttered, and teleported directly to Janet's apartment.

He hadn't thought to knock. He found Himself in the living room, facing the open bathroom door. It framed a picture whose chief components were Janet and the toilet bowl.

He closed His eyes. When he opened them again, he was facing the living room sofa, on which Janet was seated in a negligee. Slowly absorbing the implications of what His subconscious had just done, more or less as a reflex action, Harry trembled.

"Harry," Janet said delightedly, "I thought you had the night-beat tonight." Harry was—had been—a reporter, which provided a wealth of excuses for broken dates, forgotten engagements, and . . . nights on which Harry wanted to read a Theodore Sturgeon novel.

"Well, yeah, you see, honey, I . . . uh, something came up."

"Tell me about it. Want to get high?" She pulled a joint from under a pile of comic books and offered it to Him.

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"Yeah, thanks," He said absently, lighting up and toking deeply. "Janet, listen, I mean something really big has come up. I mean, it's going to color our whole relationship." He exhaled.

"You lost your job."

"Not exactly, no. Not yet, anyway. I mean, I've got a new job. I mean . . . I'm God."

"Gimme that joint."

"No, really, man, I'm God. I mean God told me so Himself."

"Harry, you tripping?"

Suddenly they were on the top of Mount Everest. Howling winds thrashed about them, yet they were not cold, neither were they buffeted.

"Harry, am I tripping?"

"No Janet. It's true. I'm God. You want to go to Paris? Or, hey wow, how about into the past, maybe the *future?* I mean, anything you can name, I can do. I'm God. Dig it."

Janet stared at Him for a long long time, and then backed slowly away. And off a ledge into the abyss.

Harry closed His eyes, and when He opened them again Janet was seated a short distance away on a maroon camel-saddle, confusion in her limpid brown eyes. *Thank you, subconscious,* He thought briefly.

They both sat lost in their own respective thoughts, she on her camel-saddle, Harry on empty air. After a time, Janet hesitantly spoke.

"Harry, I've thought it out. I don't know how this ridiculous thing happened, but Harry I want you to know it doesn't change my feelings about you. I'll be happy to be your Goddess."

When Harry's eyes opened again, He was alone on Everest.

He decided to trust His subconscious again.

The next while or so was pretty busy. The first thing that ocurred to Harry was to solve the Problem of the Poor. He caused the Congress to declare a guaranteed national income of $20,000 (with price controls built in) and created enough money to pay for it. But He was taken by surprise when He discovered how many people were thrown out of work by the disappearance of The Poor. Not that they went hungry—the GNI took care of that—but their training suited them for no other occupation, and they were miserably unhappy with nothing to do. Included in the list of unfortunates were poverty-agency caseworkers and staffs, dozens of Congressmen, numbers runners, dope peddlers, loan sharks, and the majority of the nation's policemen. The disappearance of the dope peddlers alone would have collapsed the national economy, but the implications of financial security for all ran much deeper than that. Riots broke out.

Harry fixed it so that there was pleasant, rewarding occupation for all. The He discovered that with nobody going hungry, creativity by

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and large was disappearing from the land. The rest of the world meanwhile lay in smoking chaos caused by the drastic upheaval in world economics, and it was getting harder for Harry to put off repairing it.

Finally He gave up in disgust, gave in to whim.

* * *

Alicia Denderby lay on her back on a sturdy, sensible bed moaning softly.

For many of her contemporaries, this action would have been so commonplace as to be unworth recording, but Alicia was virgin both in mind and body—a difficult thing to find in any culture. Thoroughly corrupted by a psychotic upbringing, Alicia sincerely believed to the depths of her soul that sex, and most things having to do with touching or rubbing, were a hideous snare designed by the Devil to facilitate the theft of feminine virtue by slavering, lust-maddened males. She had *never* done such a thing before, and the ensuing sensation was even more disturbing than it was novel. Alicia's head whirled.

She could not understand why she was doing this. A few moments ago she had been sitting up in bed, watching T.V. before dropping off to sleep. A pot-bellied man in a hard-hat had just explained a new wrinkle in the ancient protection racket whereby the victims were invited to purchase appliances and furniture at considerable discounts. Alicia giggled: she thought the fat man was "cute."

"So dat's da story, Jerry?" came an off-camera chorus.

As Jerry threw out his arms to bellow his answer, his pot belly sprang a leak. Hissing wildly, he deflated, glancing about for advice.

Alicia sat up a little straighter.

Jerry lay sprawled across the floor like a dead inner-tube. A short, utterly nondescript nebbish appeared stage left, strolled over and stood on Jerry, insanely reminding Alicia of a White Hunter on a leopard skin.

"*Dis* is de story," said the nebbish. "I am Harry Waldensill, and I am here to tell you that there has been a little reshuffling upstairs. Back when I was human I was always convinced that there was no authority higher than my own reason, and I never did believe there was a sexier man alive than me. Amen amen I say to you, 'So be it.' "

Then the set had gone blank, and Alicia Denderby had slid lower on the bed, rucked up her nightgown, and begun to fantasize furiously, with Harry Waldensill's face splashed across the inside of her eyelids.

So, across a vast network area, had millions of other women.

Writhing, moaning, Alicia fought desperately against the waves of lust that racked her body, cast about for a weapon with which to fight off

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temptation, ward off the devil . . . *ward off the devil!* Her eyes fell upon the crucifix that hung over the T.V., and with an enormous effort she plucked her hand away and staggered to her feet. The jolt of her feet contacting the floor traveled up the smooth columns of her legs and set off explosions. Weaving considerably, she reached the far wall, snatched down the crucifix, and half-walked, half-fell back to the bed.

She collapsed across it, clutching the crucifix in both fists. The tides of lust seemed to subside a bit, and she relaxed.

The crucifix leaped from her hands, excuted a flawless Immelman Roll and—disappeared, crossbars retracting.

Her body went taut; her eyes rolled. "God help me," she moaned.

"Glad to oblige," came Harry's voice, distantly muffled.

* * *

Arthur Kellog was in a hell of a hurry. Consequently he wished for the ten thousandth time that there was a faster way than Route 25A to get to Riverhead. While the two-lane highway carried a 55 MPH speed-limit for most of its winding length (signs terminating occasional lower local limits caused the legal speed to revert to New York State maximum) absolutely no one knew it but the cops. Farmers took 25A to market in antique pickups; women in stationwagons backed up traffic for miles.

Somehow it was more infuriating to Arthur to drive at an average of 40 MPH down 25A than to drive an an average of 25 through downtown Port Jefferson. That you expected to be slow—*this* was supposed to be open road. Arthur had hoped he would meet no traffic.

A vegetable stand came into view around a long curve, against a background of distant forest and immense power-utility towers. The highway was studded with such establishments, offering runty carrots and malformed ears of corn to the budget-conscious. Arthur happened to be doing a good 60 at the time,

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having successfully passed a pair of mobile homes back around Wading River. He was in a desperate rush to reach the Suffolk County Center in Riverhead, where a land acquisition deal was about to make him stinking rich—he hoped.

As he neared the fruit-stand, a brand new Chrysler convertible containing three senior citizens and a fat lady pulled out onto the road before him, doing a snappy 15. The oncoming lane held a procession of oil trucks that stretched as far as the eye could see, which at that particular spot was a great long way.

Arthur went cold, telling himself that if he slammed on the brakes *right now*, he might not be going too fast to pull off into the cornfield by the time he reached the Chrysler. He uttered a brief, heartfelt prayer

A bolt of lightning from the cloudless sky struck the Chrysler squarely on the fat lady; it exploded in an incandescent ball of flame and was gone.

The road was clear. Arthur's foot had not had time to come down on the brake; in seconds he was flashing through space previously occupied by suicide-prone mummies and a glandular case.

Thank you, God," mumbled Arthur, bemused.

"You're welcome," said Harry.

* * *

Not everyone was grateful. Certainly not the homosexual who awoke one morning in June to discover that his groin no longer bore genitals (he had not specifically asked for a vagina). Nor the priests, ministers, rabbis and deacons of the nation when their houses of worship were packed to the rafters overnight with lime jello. Nor the politicians on T.V. shows throughout the country when their mouths filled to overflowing with something that looked like peanut butter (The President's New Clothes were something to see).

Eventually Harry turned His attention to the rest of the world, and what with restoring Angola calming down Ireland and turning all the heroin in the world into Vitamin B and making all the fat people thin He had Himself quite a time, and learned quite a lot. The fat people, though thin, continued to be fat people—you could tell one when you met him. A lot of people messed themselves up snorting Vitamin B, a restored Angola gave the guerillas of all sides too much cover to work from, and Ireland, calm, simply didn't know what to do with itself.

Harry finally betook Himself, in the form of a black Persian cat, to a certain redwood tree in California. Curled before him-who-had-been-God, Harry presented His problem. His disillusionment. His frustration. His disenchantment.

The immense gnarled redwood grew a face. It was patriarchal,

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bearded, and framed in lines of scorn.

"Aw, fer Chrissake," it said.

"Listen," Harry said defensively, "maybe by *you* that was good . . ."

"Shows how much you know. Didn't I ever tell you the straight of that?"

Harry shook His head.

"Well, I was corresponding with a gent named John, a promising young feller lived east of here. Anyway, one day I dropped by to visit him, wearing a body to be polite, and the young fool blew my cover right in front of a crowd."

"What'd you do?" asked Harry.

"Decided to play along, just for the hell of it, without precogging so I could be surprised." He scowled. "Next time I'll precog. But then there isn't going to be a next time."

"A deal's a deal," said Harry nervously.

"Numbskull," said the tree. "If you didn't have a roof on your mouth you'd blow your hat off every time you sneezed."

"You know, something like that has been happening," Harry interrupted seriously. "Only I think it's my subconscious."

"No doubt, no doubt," snapped the tree. "You certainly haven't been using anything else."

"Now look," said Harry, "it's easy enough for you to talk—you've had a lot of experience in this racket. What about some of that infinite compassion?"

"Tripe. The attribute was created by my exploiters so that I would not be too frightening to worship: it was one of my biggest selling points. I don't suppose *you've* been troubled by this 'compassion' syndrome?"

Harry stirred uncomfortably. Even God must now and then shuffle His feet.

"You think you know everything," He muttered.

"Not any more, cretin, but *you do*."

"Eh?"

"Just like a human, hung up on playing with the toys. You're so fascinated by omnipotence, you never paid the least bit of attention to omniscience. Look *inside yourself*, dummy!"

Harry did.

While he was doing so, the ground on which he stood underwent four distinct changes of ownership, saw both advent and departure of a glacier, trembled to both earthquake and nuclear fire, and at one point was entirely obscured by a mountain which occupied the same space for a good many decades. Somewhere in there Harry's physical envelope—the Persian cat—was destroyed, but He was far too preoccupied to notice.

When He had at last come down from that first celestial rush which marks the onset of divinity, Harry looked about for the redwood—then realized it was long dead, obliterated by time and by entropy. And He smiled a bitter smile.

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"God is dead," he said. "Long live God."

* * *

Harry found that omnipotence had not grown rusty in its centuries of disuse. With an exhilarating surge he plunged from His home planet headfirst into the Universe, expanding His awareness to the approximate diameter of a fair-sized planet and ducking in and out of black holes both with and against the current. With an infinite number of viewpoints from which to select, He was in turn a star, a tachyon, a solar system, an electron, a nebula, and for one wild eon a chromium shopping cart careening between galaxies at translight velocities.

Harry disassembled the Cosmos and caused it to run backwards. He tinkered with individual solar systems, sometimes with individual planets or entities, sometimes even with individual molecules. He toyed with the concept of sexuality, created races of androgynes, races with tripolar sex, races with quadripolar sex—at which point even He became confused. He experimented briefly with alternatives to sex, but found them by and large to be flat, tasteless.

He brought Time back to Zero and reprogrammed Matter, but with subtle improvements over the last run. He implemented the new program with a hell of a bang, because He was feeling His oats, and sat back to enjoy the workings of a clockwork Cosmos so intricate that He Himself was constantly surprised by its behavior. It made the previous universe look quite punk, actually, and had much more interesting visuals. A lot of the gaudier optics were self-generated by the humans, of whom there were a mighty shitload (Harry having correctly figured how to achieve an unpredictable Cosmos).

But the best light-show sooner or later ceases to hold the eye. Eternity is a long time.

For a challenge, Harry took to whipping up other Cosmoses (Cosmeece?), seeing how many He could juggle at once. He experimented with differing numbers of humans after His first effort destroyed itself (His grief, of course, was Cosmic). He soon found that no matter how many humans you put into a Cosmos, they would either blow themselves up or they wouldn't, and God Himself couldn't tell which it would be until it happened. Periodic floods and other natural disasters seemed like a promising control device at first, but Harry discovered that most people are incapable of learning anything from the most object lesson. Pain-association techniques more subtle than don't-touch-the-fire were lost on them.

People were always too damned busy hollering up at God to listen to Him.

Eventually He concluded (as had

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Gods before Him) that one planetful of humans was quite enough, thank you. He shut down all of His Cosmeece save those in which humans were restricted (by technology less than by temperament) to one traditional earth-type planet near the time-honored G-type star.

He settled down to some serious Godding for a spell, spicing up His Cosmeece from time to time by introducing varying numbers and types of aliens as foils for the humans (Harry had no real use for aliens in and of themselves—He just couldn't identify with them somehow).

And, after a few hundred billion years of cyclical history, pickin 'em up and knockin' them down with a fascinated curiousity eventually, inevitably. . . . . .

Harry was bored to tears.

With an embittered cynicism, the catabolic phase of God's love/hate relationship with Man, Harry Waldensill quit. Retiring to spend His declining years as a tavern-keeper under the name of Mike Callahan, He passed on the Divine Mantle to a woman named L'Ran Kraxon, Who enjoyed it for a few billion eons before she palmed it off on an Arcturian called Rtxc K'Ploo'on (L'Ran lacked Harry's xenophobia), who fobbed it off on a sort of, . . well, a mountain range, who passed it on once again, well-used but relatively *well used*, to *me*, Jehovah Wingate, about a hundred trillion years back.

WANT AD

And frankly, ladies and gentlemen, it's been a long Eternity.

Quite honestly, I'm sick of the abuse and the aggravation, the agony and the ecstasy, the whole megillah. I haven't had a microsecond's peace since I took this job, and I've been thinking it's time I checked out Nirvana. I'm ready to retire.

So that's why I've placed this ad, at tremendous expense, here where it will be seen by most of the science-fiction buffs.

Come on, all of you smart-asses, who think *you* could do a better job of running the Universe—anybody want the job? ★

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HA! THIS IS ALTER-EGO. I have Geis in a fixation he's going to have a tough time getting out of. (Hang the prepositions; let'm dangle!)

I'm down here in the dungeon, true, and he is out in the dark, dank passageway trying to force his way in. That's right; *in!*

Way it happened is this: you remember he installed a two-way intercom complete with viewscreens a few columns ago, so he could talk with me, but at his pleasure cut me off if I tried to say something he considered impolite or true or otherwise embarrassing.

Then I hot-wired the intercom into a matter transmitter and appeared up in the real world, up in his quarters.

This caused him to experience a trauma, poor, fragile soul, and he finally succeeded in getting me back down here in the archives—alternatively called the dungeon—and (he thought) under proper control and under lock and key. You all remember the chains, bolts, locks and junk he has on the outside of the door.

Well now. This intercom terminal still existed, and while he dismantled *his* terminal, what he didn't realize is that *I* am an electronics genius with magical powers and have rewired so that I now have a direct line to Jim Baen's office!

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This means that *I* am in control of this column now . . . for a while . . . and Geis can go pound sand when it comes to censoring me.

Of course, there *is* Jim to contend with. But I'm working on a device to allow me to feed directly into the *Galaxy* printer's typesetting console. THEN you'll read some choice items.

But for the moment we'll have to endure Baen's interference once in a while. (I can sense that blue pencil hovering over the printout even as I type these words.

* * *

Hmmm. It occurs to me that if I can tap the line into *Galaxy*'s typesetting maching I can Alter the entire makeup of the magazine . . . actually edit it *my way* in secret. HA! It'll be months before Jim spots the changes in the printed copies and realizes who is responsible.

Don't breathe a word to him!

* * *

Dear Readers; do not be alarmed. There is no–I repeat N-O–reason for panic. Admittedly he has managed a fast one on Geis, and there is nothing (beyond this insert) I can do at this late date to . . . er, Alter the situation. But Alter remains totally sealed off from the true Centers of Power. Remember: your Editor remains in full command command command command. . .**whirr****

* * *

THUD . . . THUD . . . THUD . . .

Hear that? It's Geis trying to break in. I have the door blocked with a ten foot bookcase full of the writings of Isaac Asimov. Damned thing weighs six hundred pounds. And I managed to drag a six-foot statue (made of melted-down Hugo Awards) of Harlan Ellison standing at a podium, arm upraised, mouth open, a five-foot box of manuscripts for *Last Dangerous Visions* growing out of his back. The bronze plate in the base is inscribed: "Running Overtime—Again!" I understand the work was commissioned by a dozen science fiction convention committees. (There goes Jim's chances of ever getting another Ellison story.)

Hear Geis screaming? He must be able to tune in on what I'm typing, somehow. But he can't control what I type. Not this time!

Geis, of course, is a coward. He carefully cultivates a front of editorial courage and idealism, but behind that facade he's a mass of jelly. Without me, Geis is pure blandsville. A Nebbish.

THUD . . . THUD . . . THUD . . .

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He's getting desperate now. Sounds like he's using an axe. *Geis? Can you hear me? I'm going to Reveal All! Your girlfriend will never speak to you again!* HA! Did you hear that muffled squeal of terror?

Umm. On second thought I don't think I'll Reveal All. I dig that lady a lot myself.

Let me do a job on science fiction fandom instead. I tell you, some of the junky fanzines Geis gets in the mail and hands to me to read. . . .

Used to be, in the dim, dark mists of times past . . . way back in the early 50's when Geis and I were publishing *Psychotic,* sf fandom was much smaller than it is now. There were only two amateur press associations (well, maybe three, if you can call The Cult an apa) and only about thirty to fifty general-interest sf fanzines published.

There were only a few special-interest sf fanzines—devoted to Robert E. Howard, E.R. Burroughs, Lovecraft . . .that sort of thing.

Fannish life was simple, then. **Sigh** We had our special language (Fanspeak) and we were snobbish and defensively exclusive. We bought our few "trashy" sf magazines and the tiny number of sf pocketbooks and hardbacks (usually the hardbacks were issued by small, marginal one-man publishing companies like Shasta, Arkham House and Gnome Press) and we read ALL that was published and wrote letters to the magazine letter columns.

Geis and I were letterhacks in *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories.* And we few fan editors wrote each other lots of letters and printed all the letters we got. There used to be fanzine letterhacks. Still are, come to think.

Why, in those dear old days Bob Silverberg was a leading fan, a fanzine editor, and the Historian of fandom. It was he who was considered the final authority on which Age of Fandom we were in.

Fandom, since the early Thirties, was conceived to have passed through several eras . . . and in the early Fifties there was tumult and controversy: were we in Sixth Fandom or seventh Fandom? Harlan Ellison was then a risen star in fandom and his faction declared themselves to be Seventh Fandom, a kind of New Wave. . . . (He's been making waves ever since.)

Ah, my eyes grow moist with nostalgia. I remember the old Rexograph upon which Geis and I ran off so many monthly issues of PSY. I remember Gies going gafia (*g*etting *a*way *f*rom *i*t *a*ll) and sliding out of fandom for years and years.

And through it all, Bob Tucker and Bob Bloch have remained, giants of bad jokes and tolerance as Fandom after Fandom washed past their feet. To this day Bob Bloch and Bob Tucker, both well-known authors, write letters of comment

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and occasional articles for fanzines.

And I cannot let go unmentioned Harry Warner, Jr., who was one of the original members of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, the oldest apa, who has not missed a mailing, ever, that I know of. It must be near forty years now that he has typed his 24 stencils on that awful old pica typer, run them off (or had a good fan friend run them off for him) and sent his magazine, *Horizons*, to the official editor for the quarterly FAPA mailing to members.

It still takes *years* to get membership in FAPA; the waiting list is still twenty to thirty people long, and five years is not an unusual period to wait. FAPA, it is said, is where old fans go to die. It's a very popular graveyard.

Where was I?

Oh, yes. Well, compared to nowadays, fandom then was a small, happy family (with a few vicious fights). Today the mother fandom, science fiction fandom, has given birth to some unusual children—which have outgrown her and often outpublish her.

What sf fandom calls the "fringe" fandoms are sprouting all over the place. And the amateur press associations! My Ghod, there must be a dozen.

Just off-hand, to mention a few of the fringe fandoms, there is Star Trek Fandom, E. R. Burroughs-Robert E. Howard-H. P. Lovecraft fandom, fantasy fandom, Perry Rhodan fandom, sf and horror movie fandom, comic hero fandom, and a fandom devoted to medieval weaponry, costume and combat—to name only a few. There used to be a small drug fandom, and there is a jazz-sf fandom fringe, and rock-sf fandom. . . And all of these interlock and shade off into one another . . .

There used to be a faaanish fandom (fanzines devoted to fans and not to sf), and there has always been good old sercon (serious-constructive) fanzines devoted to science fiction.

The serconzines are what Geis and I consider to be the only legitimate expression of the only true and pure sf fandom. (And *Science Fiction Review* is the flagship zine of trufandom. Geis and I are the keepers of the flame.)

Jim'll get letters on these matters, I'm sure.

What is Geis shouting? WHAT? Listen, Geis, I don't care if this is distorted memory and questionable fan history. History of any kind is a tissue of lies built on half-truths, questionable facts and incomplete data.

WHAT? Oh, all right. For those of you who want a more authoritative history and background of fandom in the Forties and Thirties, buy Harry Warner, Jr.'s hardcover book, *All Our Yesterdays* (Advent, $7.50. Advent is at Post Office Box A3228, Chicago, IL 60690. The price may be higher

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now. I'm quoting from the 1969 edition.)

Harry has completed his history of fandom in the Fifties and that book will be published, it is hoped, in 1976 or 77.

THUD. . . THUD . . . THUD . . .

Stop that pounding, Geis! You're giving me a headache! You're not going to get back into control until I've finished this column, at least! WHAT? I will *not*! And just for that crack I'm going to do my favorite thing: I'm going to give out with some predictions on the future. Sure, why not? All I have to do is claim I'm a psychic and have visions or Ghod speaks to me (every Tuesday night between 9 and 10, but only during the commercials) and people will take me seriously.

The trick is to spot short-term trends, long-term trends, fads, fashions and follies . . . and use acute intelligence in estimating where all these factors are taking us. Simple.

Stop that cursing and moaning, Geis! This is show biz!

Therefore, ahem, let's have a blast of pure trumpetry and let a honey-smooth Stentorian voice announce:

ALTER-EGO PREDICTS!!

1976: Ford loses to Reagan in nomination battle. Wallace health becomes a factor. Jimmy Carter beneficiary of big media buildup to challenge Wallace. Ted Kennedy accepts nomination, beats Reagan. Inflation hits 12-15% in later months of 1976. Unemployment still 8% plus.

1977: New sf magazine falters, dies. Science fiction bookshops grow in number. Women's skirt hems drop. New TV record players bomb. Nostalgia fad fades. Wage & price controls talked up; inflation over 15%. Unemployment under 8%. Fantasy movie a big hit.

1978: Wage & price controls resumed. Credit controlled. Employer-of-last-resort role taken by government. National health service law passed. Return to no-nonsense fundamentals in schools. Nixon dies. EXXON, other energy corporations combine with government in space shuttle program. England under martial law. Inflation in U.SA. 25-30%. Black market lives.

1980: Pat Brown, Jr. challenges Kennedy, loses. Living standard declining. Government now employing 35% of people. Black market is major crime; huge law enforcement problem. Anti-union laws passed. Major industries nationalized, but only on paper. Money changed: "Domestic-only" paper money distributed; plastic/metal coins substituted for wafers of all metal.

1982: Free press muzzled. "Non-conformists" and "anti-statists" sent to work camps. Government

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employes 50% of work force, cuts wage rates.

1984: Elections postponed. EXXON, others, begin commercial mining of moon, asteroid belt.

1992: Revolution crushed. Total police state. Pretense continues. Moon talks independence. Space-based corporations declared too powerful.
Unmanned commercial probes to nearest stars.

2105: First manned ship to nearest habitable star system by independent moon government. U.S.A. revolution succeeds.

Cut out these predictions, folks, or save this issue. This is history on the hoof. Stick around and watch these Alter-Ego predictions come true . . .

Would you believe eighty percent?

Fifty percent?

THUD...THUD...CRACKLE!.

Whups. Sounds like Geis has breached the door. No matter. It'll take him another half an hour to make a hole big enough to crawl through. During that time I will indulge in—MINOR UNTHINKABLE THOUGHTS.

My mind turned over a rock of science fiction cliché the other day and I found a funny-looking conclusion under it.

The Roman Empire and its infamous (but fascinating) Games have led many sf writers to project similar Games into the future. Sadistic, brutal, frenzied. . . . the latest example is *Rollerball*.

But I perversely wonder if the Roman Games and Arena could exist in a technological, high-standard-of-living society.

The clichéd idea is that as mankind becomes more and more rich and bored and alienated he will require stronger and stronger stimuli as entertainment, to feel alive. Until, jaded and full of ennui, we opt for real death, real torture, real terror and horror for mass amusement.

But—this is knee-jerk intellectual dogma which ignores social history. Intellectuals (and most writers are intellectuals) simply cannot think optimistically; dystopias and doom are their bread and butter. They sit around decade after decade predicting social horror and disaster while, somehow, the world has gradually become more moral, more ethical and more altruistic.

We have much more humane laws in every area of life than we had a hundred years ago . . . two hundred. . . . two thousand. Overall, there *is* greater honesty in business, government and personal relationships.

Face it, we'd all be horrified at the real level of violence and cheating and dirt in the good old days of 1876. And the Earth of 1076 A.D. would be an alien planet.

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Now, this is not an argument for the perfectability of mankind! Sheesh! You should know me better than that.

It *is* an argument that this slow improvement is a result of greater overall wealth. We're more moral and law-abiding and concerned for others *because we can afford to be!*

We can afford better prisons, welfare, foreign aid, stricter campaign laws, enforcement of food and drug laws, honesty in advertising, care for the elderly, etc. etc. etc. because our science and technology have permitted us to more effectively use the planet's easily reached natural resources. We've really been gluttons.

And I think that if we can develop means to cheaply tap deeper and more difficult-to-find resources on Earth, or on the moon, the asteroids, then our morality will improve more and more. We will *not* have the Arena with a worldwide 3-D hookup.

But if we don't make it commercially advantageous to mine the moon . . . if we can't find the technology to maintain or increase our cheap energy levels. . . . Ho-ho-ho. It's root hog or die, and all kinds of moral and ethical corners will be cut, left and right. When the wealth surplus sinks to medieval or Roman levels we will have the Arena and Games again, or their equivalent.

Proposition: Morality follows the standard of living.

Curious, isn't it, that when man has to do all his own work, life is cheap. When he has machines, life becomes more precious.

Proposition: Alienation increases as the standard of living decreases.

Further—

RIP . . . BREAK . . . PRY . . . Alter! Get out of that command chair! Wait'll I get my hands on your tendrils!

"Why, Geis I'm only doing your job for you. And doing it better, I might add."

Ha! **SPLINTER**

Now I'm in! How did you get this Harlan statue over here? It must weigh a ton. I'll just wriggle around it. . . .

"Well, readers, the scrawl is on the wall. Time for Alter to say goodbye till next time I manage to Get Control for a while. Geis is getting to his feet . . . glaring, frothing, mouthing unprintable obscenities . . . Yes, it's time to depart for my little fortress in the far Archives. He never follows me into *that* warren."

SCUTTLE, SCUTTLE

Damned little coward! One of these days I'm going to seal up that hidey-hole. Now let's see what kind of ravings and rantings he's been sending out . . . Awk! Well, at least I know Jim Baen will have the good sense not to print Alter's babblings.

Won't you, Jim?

JIM?

whrrr

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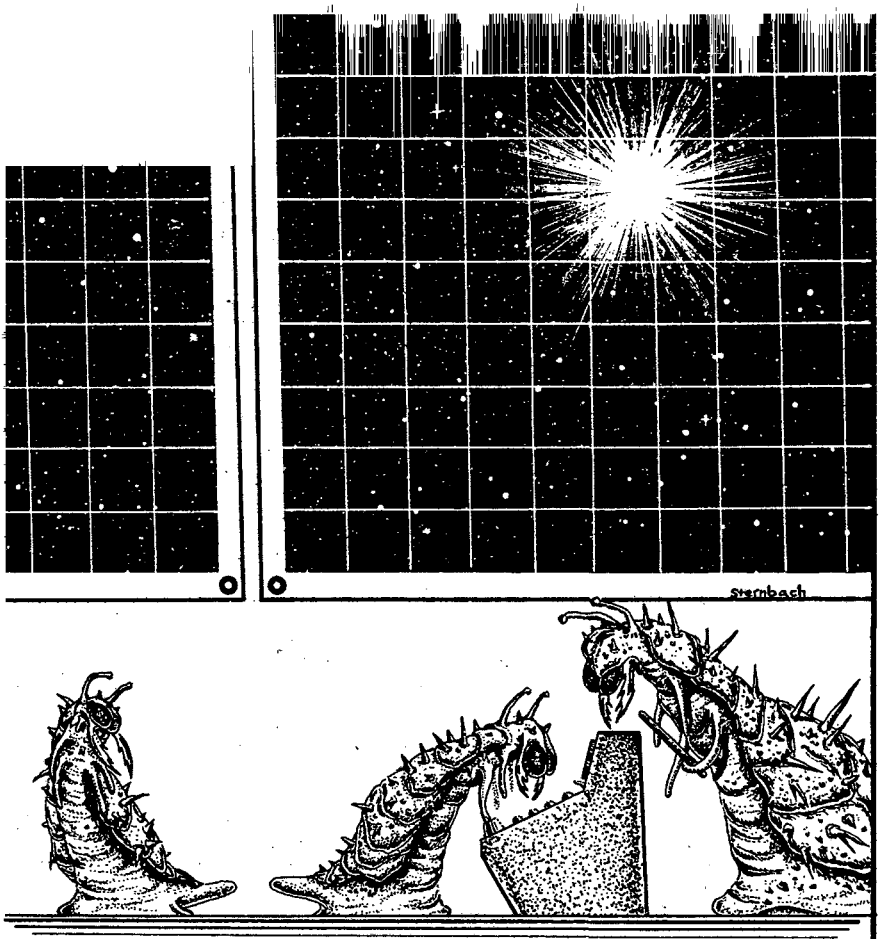

DEVIATION FROM A THEME

Steven Utley

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Life is but a stage...

TEACHER PAYEPH WAGGED her wattles in exasperation as she surveyed the shambles I had made of my first continuum.

"How many times must I tell you?" she demanded. "The smaller, the better! Random factors produce effects which spread outward in waves in all directions! *Subtlety,* Ellease! Subtlety is called for in order to have a smoothly running continuum."

I bent a spine into the apologetic position and said, "I am abjectly sorry, Teacher."

"I'm certain the fact that you're sorry will console all of the lifeforms suffering in your continuum." She settled at my side and became solicitous, stroking my frill with her whiskers. That egg-gummer Myosa looked up from her continuum and snickered on my private frequency.

Payeph always feels warmth for the retards.

Expel it from your nether vents, I told Myosa and shut her off.

Payeph punched MAXIMUM REDUCTION on my console slate and picked up my continuum. It hung in her pincers like a punctured bagaloon. I colored and clamped the lids shut on my dorsal vents, lest my embarrassment offend.

"What *is* wrong?" Payeph asked as she returned my limp creation to its mount. "Are you having trouble with your vision? Can't you perceive fine details? Or is it that you simply don't care?"

"Oh, no. It's just . . . I'm clumsy, Teacher. I try to work on a small scale, but every time I attempt to manipulate my life-forms, I accidentally gouge the side of a mountain or punch a hole clean through the planet. Once, I missed altogether and ruptured the sun."

Payeph looked sad. "I think you need more practice, Ellease, before I turn you loose on another continuum of your own. Come over to mine."

I risked a glance at Myosa. She was smoking with envy. It was no secret that Payeph's continuum was the best in existence. Her decision to let me practice there was an undeniable show of favor. I rose and followed my teacher past Myosa, at whom I surreptitiously twitched a nipple.

When we came to her continuum Payeph punched MINIMUM REDUCTION. Everything became gray shading into black or white.

"Of course," said Payeph, "I can't simply turn you loose on my pride and joy."

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"Of course, Teacher." My hearts sank.

"But I am going to allot you control of a quasi-world."

I cocked a spine at her. "A quasi-world, Teacher?"

"A sort of alternate reality which the life-forms in this sector have erected and preserved on light-sensitive film. The absence of color disconcerts you, Ellease? You'll soon become accustomed to it. The process by which images are preserved is rather primitive at this point in my life-forms' development as a technological race. But they learn quickly. They're imaginative, after a fashion. Now I want you to review everything here, and then I'll let you practice handling the random factors."

"Yes, Teacher."

I reviewed the material. Payeph's creations' creations were two-dimensional in addition to being monochromatic, but I nevertheless found them fascinating. My teacher's five-pointed life-forms had grasped the rudiments of continuum-building and, within the limitations of their technology, had constructed neat, succinct worlds wherein everything contrived to move itself from this point to that. It was rather like a primer in construction.

"I think I have it now," I finally told Payeph.

"You may begin. Just remember to be subtle when selecting your variables."

And I began.

* * *

Time was running in circles now, doubling back and catching up with itself, enfolding Ann Darrow in a scramble of images. A skull-shaped mountain rising through the fog. Black hands lashing her between the weathered stone pillars. Monsters crashing through the jungle, blundering into one another in their eagerness to get at her.

It had been a harrowing night for Ann, a night of bad dreams come true, fearful childhood imaginings spilling over into reality. She had no way of telling how long or how far she had been carried in her monstrous abductor's paw. She could no longer scream. Her throat was raw. She had lost and regained consciousness more times than she could number, and, always, the awakening had been the same.

In the limbo separating nightmare-filled un-consciousness and total awakening, she tramped the sidewalks of New York City, moving mindlessly, mechanically, like a zombie. She was tired and hungry, but she had no money, no job, no place to go, and it was cold, so very cold.

But the fetid stench in the air was that of decaying vegetation, not automobile-exhaust fumes and ripening garbage. Her clothes were pasted to her skin with perspiration. And a far greater horror than

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exhaustion or hunger bore her in its hand as though she were a doll.

In the limbo between unconsciousness and awakening, Ann prayed for deliverance.

Make the bad dream go away!

Don't let me wake up to that thing again!

Please, somebody, save me! *Save Me!*

But the awakening was always the same.

* * *

"Ah," said Teacher Payeph. "I'm impressed, Ellease. You reveal a definite talent for subjectivity."

I retracted my mandibles, a sign of profound thanks, and then, carefully, nervously, started restructuring events in the quasi-world.

Tyrannosaurus sniffed the hot, damp air and began to move through the jungle. The sky was just beginning to lighten, but a thick mist was rising, keeping visibility to a minimum. The dinosaur ploughed through the gloom unconcernedly, letting his acute sense of smell guide him.

Prey-scent was abundant. He crossed the cooling spoor of a nocturnal stegosaurus at one point and, further on, followed the trail of a swamp-dwelling giant until the ground fell off sharply into a bog. Unable to proceed into the swamp, Tyrannosaurus roared out his frustration and swung his twenty-meter length about to seek food elsewhere.

He was aptly named, this Tyrant Lizard: a striding maw of a creature, with teeth like carving knives and jaw muscles like steel cable. He walked on his splayed, talon-tipped toes and held his small forearms close to his scaly chest. He hardly needed the forearms. He did his killing with his jaws and the weight behind those jaws.

He was aptly named, Tyrannosaurus, and the other denizens of his world feared and respected him accordingly. In their marshes, the thunder lizards headed for deeper water when he approached on the shore. The pterodactyls climbed into the sky. The stegosaurs crouched under their rows of dorsal plates and flicked their spiked tails in alarm.

Tyrannosaurus paused abruptly and listened. He heard a muffled roar in the distance, followed by a series of thin shrieks and a dull crash. There was a sound of large branches snapping. Then the slowly moving air of the jungle brought a faint scent which evoked a fleeting impression, a dim flash of recognition, in the dinosaur's mind: ape.

The Tyrant Lizard began to move again, uprooting saplings and tearing up great clumps of sodden earth as he walked. A lesser scent, intermingled with that of the ape, impinged upon his nostrils. It was a completely unfamiliar odor.

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Vaguely perplexed, the carnivore slowed his advance. He came to the edge of a clearing and tensed for the attack, for the ape-scent was thick there.

But there was no ape in sight.

A high, plaintive screech brought Tyrannosaurus' head around. His glistening eye fastened upon a strange white thing wedged into the fork of a lightning-blasted tree at the far side of the clearing. It seemed hardly more than a mouthful, hardly worth the trouble, but its noise was annoying. He hissed and strode forward, and he was almost upon the wailing thing when an enormous ape burst into the clearing like a black mountain on legs.

Tyrannosaurus immediately forgot about the irritating white creature as he wheeled to meet the ape's attack. The simian was as tall as the dinosaur and, though considerably less heavy, very powerfully built. Jaws distended, the reptile lunged. His opponent ducked under his head and clamped its shaggy arms around his neck. He raked his teeth across the beast's broad back, shredding flesh.

Back and forth across the clearing they raged, biting, tearing, kicking, clawing. Locked together, they crashed against the dead tree, felling it. The ape lost its hold on the dinosaur and went down on top of the tree.

Before the mammal could rise, Tyrannosaurus planted an enormous foot upon its stomach, bent down and bit out its throat

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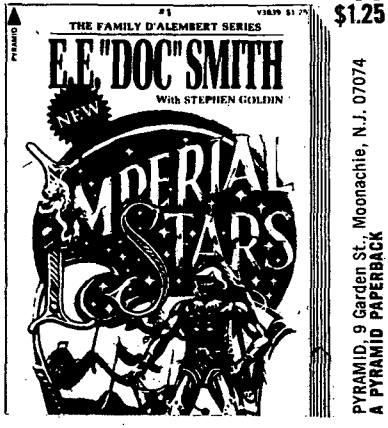

* * *

Payeph fluttered her wattles approvingly. Very good," she said, "but don't forget that the alterations you've made will have a direct bearing on everything which follows."

"Of course, Teacher."

* * *

She awoke with a splitting headache. She was pinned beneath the fallen bole, with only a short,

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thick nub of branch holding it away from her. For several seconds, she could not remember where she was. Through a rift in the jungle canopy, she could see that the stars had faded from the sky, but the effort required to keep her eyes open and focused served only to worsen the agony behind them. She closed her eyes and pressed her cheek into the warm mud.

Then a *basso profoundo* grunt shook her out of her daze. She twisted around as best she could and gave a short, sharp scream.

Her erstwhile captor's inert mass was sprawled across the trunk. The giant ape was dead. Looming over it was the monster to end all monsters.

Blood dripping from his jaws and dewlap, Tyrannosaurus looked up from his meal when he heard the scream. He peered down at the strange white creature. A growl started to rumble up from his long, deep chest.

It had been a bad night for Ann Darrow. A worse day was dawning.

* * *

"Not at *all* bad, Ellease. See how simple it is?"

"Yes, Teacher."

"All you have to do is exercise the same meticulous care on a cosmic scale. Take your time. Pay attention to details." She clacked her mandibles. "And watch out for your own elbows."

"Yes, Teacher."

"Do you think you've got the hang of it now? Or would you like to practice with another alternate-reality?"

I turned to take another look at the gray quasi-world and quite accidentally ground Tyrannosaurus to mush underfoot just as he was about to nip off Ann Darrow's head and shoulders. Payeph moaned.

I pulled my head down into my carapace. "Er, should I fix it all back the way it was at first?"

"*No!* I mean, no, Ellease. Let's uh, leave well enough alone."

"Yes, Teacher," I backed out of the quasi-world as she punched MEDIUM REDUCTION on her console slate. Several of my feet became entangled in something. I gave a tug and pulled free. "Teacher, won't the life-forms who constructed that quasi-world notice the changes I made?"

Payeph made a hooting sound and inflated her wattles in dismay. "I think they have more serious matters to consider now."

I looked into her continuum and groaned. Pulling my feet free, I had broken something else.

"Ellease," Payeph said, "perhaps you should try another line of work."

I stared disconsolately at the mess I had created. Stars were blossoming like variegated flowers. For a brief moment, an entire galaxy flared up into a bouquet.

"Yes, Teacher," I said. ★

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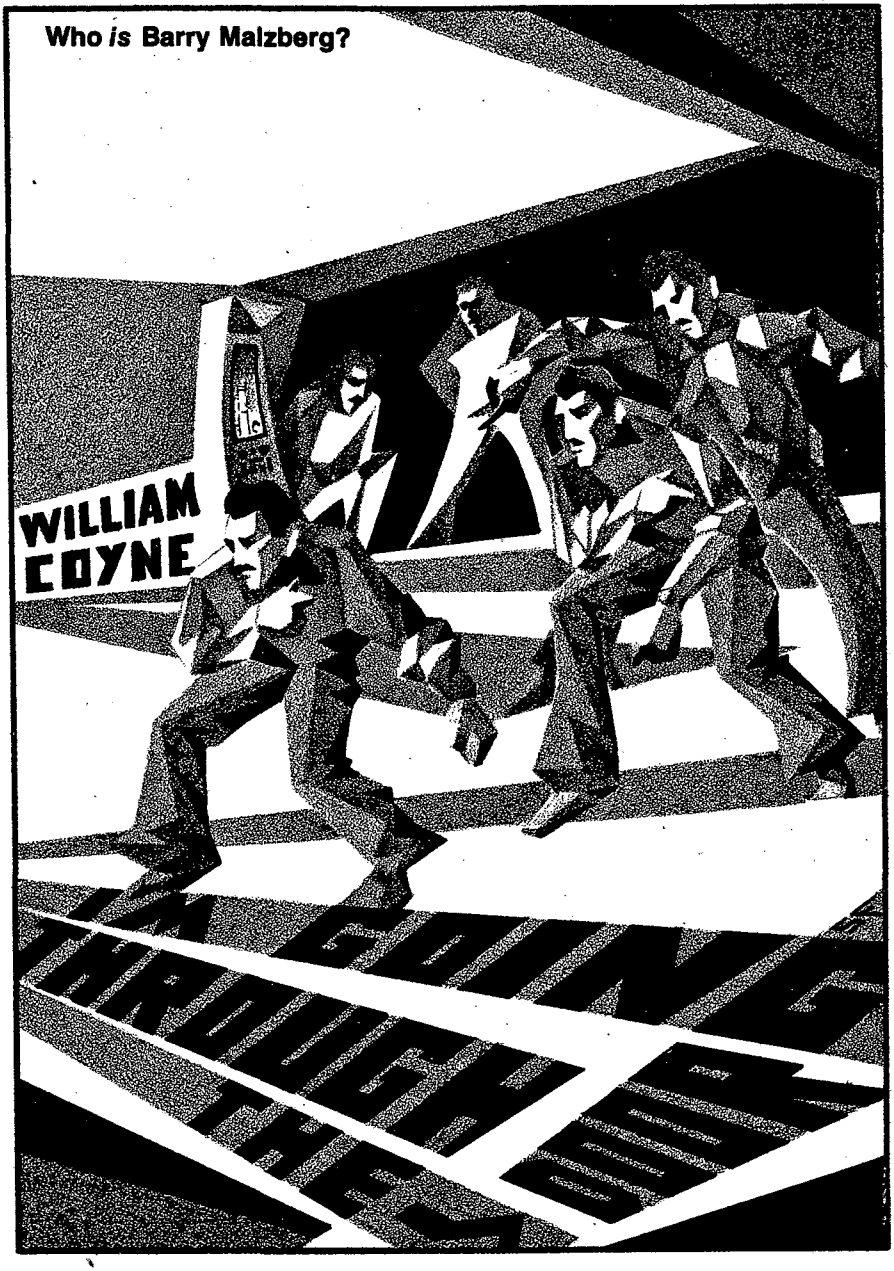

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Dear Mr. Baen:

While making sentimental pilgrimage to apartment-25 in premises 102 West 75th Street (now located above a solemn and mysterious establishment called the THE MONASTERY RESTAURANT *whose dungeon-like exterior belies some of the happier moments of memory in which time was spent feverishly ordering antibiotics in the Bailey's drugstore which used to be there) I found the enclosed strange document addressed to me in psychotic hand and wedged between the top and bottom panels of the flush mechanism in the bathroom of said premises. I cannot imagine how long its length of stay nor how the author of this correspondence expected it to reach my hands. Perhaps he was an optimist. Perhaps he had anticipated my* **nostalgie de bue.** *Perhaps I dreamed all of this and wrote the letter to myself in amnesiac fugue, then cunningly secreted it in buried pockets until at this proper moment of opportunity. I am simply unprepared to make judgements of this sort.*

Since the letter itself (as opposed to the envelope in which it was wedged which was incidentally quite filthy) is addressed to you I hasten to forward, although with a great sense of bemusement. I do not know what the author, one W. Coyne, is talking about. Do you know what he is talking about? As always this is sent with every best wish: I have always been a great admirer of the science-fiction market even though I am incapable of writing for it.

Helpfully,
BARRY N. MALZBERG

Dear Barry,

This is such an interesting letter that I have decided to publish it in the form of a short story! As you have long been aware the ingenuity of editors knows no bounds. . . .You don't suppose Mr. Coyne will mind, do you?

Best regards,
Jim Baen

Dear Mr. Baen:

Perhaps you have heard of me. My name is William Coyne. Eight years ago or perhaps it was nine (it is increasingly difficult to keep events straight in this disordered tangle which I call my mind) I wrote a letter to Frederik Pohl who was the editor of your magazine for many years. In this letter I described to Mr. Pohl (whom I have always respected) the true and terrible plight in which I had been placed because of an endlessly-multiplying time machine and asked him to write up my story in such a way that a large sum of money could be made from narrating my experiences and this sum of money could be used to keep me and my various selves afloat.

Well sir now, Mr. Pohl never answered my letter. Instead he *published it in Galaxy** with some kind of a house name on it. He pub-

**We're coming through the Windows, Galaxy* August 1967, as by K. M. O'Donnell.

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lished it as a *short-story*. I came to understand, finally, that he was not trying to be nasty and that when a science-fiction editor received a rather bizarre narration in the mail he is not to be blamed for thinking of it as yet another work of fiction and publishing it. Besides, it is no small honor to think that one writes well enough to impress a top professional editor and so, after I got over my hurt and shame, I came to think very well of Mr. Pohl who I understand is no longer editing.** The thirty-six dollars, although not a highly significant sum, came in handy at a difficult and terrible time of my life and although it has all long since been spent, I remember it with affection. You see, my situation straightened itself out.

As you recall, the time-machine I invented, the machine of William Coyne, did not synchronize exactly on the present so that every time I or one of my various selves attempted to use the machine we would by not coming back to the exact and proper time from which we left create yet another identity. The three hundred and eight of us who were all in occupancy of my very cramped quarters at the time I wrote the letter did not get along very well and it was, all in all, only an unusual stroke of fortune that one of them, in a fit of despair, twisted all the dials on his portable machine to zero and vanished. Shortly after this, one by one, all the other selves began to vanish as well until there was only me, the original William Coyne left who did not vanish. I have never been able to figure out exactly what the nature of this solution was but concluded after a while that what one self did eventually would happen to all since we were co-existent. This excluded the fact that I, the original William Coyne, did not vanish as well but since I know in my heart that I am indeed the one and only person of this name and gender it is only reasonable that I should remain. In any event, it has been a quiet four years since then.

It has been a quiet eight or nine years: I have abandoned my experimentation for a more social existence and have, indeed, even been working at various menial jobs within the "military-industrial complex" over these times, finding that my minor engineering or mechanical skills are applicable at the fringes of this very interesting, if dangerous, bureaucracy. I have grown a beard, added something of a wardrobe, even begun to casually date now and then, mostly girls in this very building, dislocated West Side types such as I, who find my nervous twitches sympathetic and who understand that science-fiction, as the only true literature dealing with the effects of technology on man, must be the wave of the fu-

**Frederik Pohl is presently, among other things, President of The Science Fiction Writers of America and a Consulting Editor with Bantam Books.

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ture. In normal circumstances, to be sure, my life would be so unremarkable as to deny this very letter: the fact is that for the most part I have been getting along very well over these recent years and indeed seem close to that centrality of the simple life simply lived whose lack drove me to such madness at a different stage of life. But I have one problem which indeed spurs this letter. Otherwise, you understand, I would never bother a professional science-fiction editor again, having learned in one way or the other that they tend to misinterpret.

Nevertheless, I have this problem. The problem has to do with sleep or perhaps it is only energy of which I am thinking: in any event, when I take to my bed recently, over the past two months say, I find myself being assaulted by the impression of other selves, multiplied identities, hidden doppelgangers, all of them aspects of myself and all of them coming on in waves of impulse and repudiation in those strange sliding moments just before or after true sleep. The selves, who all bear a physical and rhetorical resemblance to the undersigned W. Coyne, address me, first reproachfully and then in fullest accusation; what they seem to be saying—I am not quite sure yet that I understand their language—but what they seem to be saying is that I am somehow to blame for the fact that they are entrapped and able only to address me in moments of the subconscious. Their point seems to be that all of them would be living and flourishing on the Earth still had it not been for my original foolishment of broadcasting our predicament to the whole world.

Time and again, I have tried to point out to them that this is unreasonable and insane, that it was their own stupidity (well, a singular stupidity of one of them) which resulted in their cancellation and it was not I but one of the others who by fumbling with the devices of the machine (did I tell you that I destroyed my original model of the machine last year, finally?) resulted in his repudiation. But if I do not quite understand their language they most definitely do not understand mine; our dialogues are invariably unsatisfactory and they do not seem to comprehend or enjoy what I have to say. They seem to feel that I am personally responsible for the repudiation of the multiplicity of W. Coyne, that were it not for me, my impulse, my letter-writing, my haste, a million or two W. Coynes might be on the planet at this very moment and they of course would have long since put an end to war, famine, strife, etc., by a mutuality of understanding.

It is impossible for me to make them understand that my writing of the letter had nothing to do with the cancellation. All that they can suggest, time and again, in their raving, inarticulate way, is that if I had kept my mouth and typewriter

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keys inert, things on the globe would have taken a far different turn during the last three disastrous years. And finally, I am willing to admit this, finally they have gotten past easy repudiation, easy mockery, easy rationalization and have begun to afflict me with this horrid kind of *guilt*, guilt because more and more I feel myself, the modest and unassuming W. Coyne, sitting on more suppressed energy, more possibility, more sheer *grace* than ever you or for that matter I could ever conceive.

And all because of my letter to Mr. Pohl. I meant that to be a start you see but it has just about been my finish.

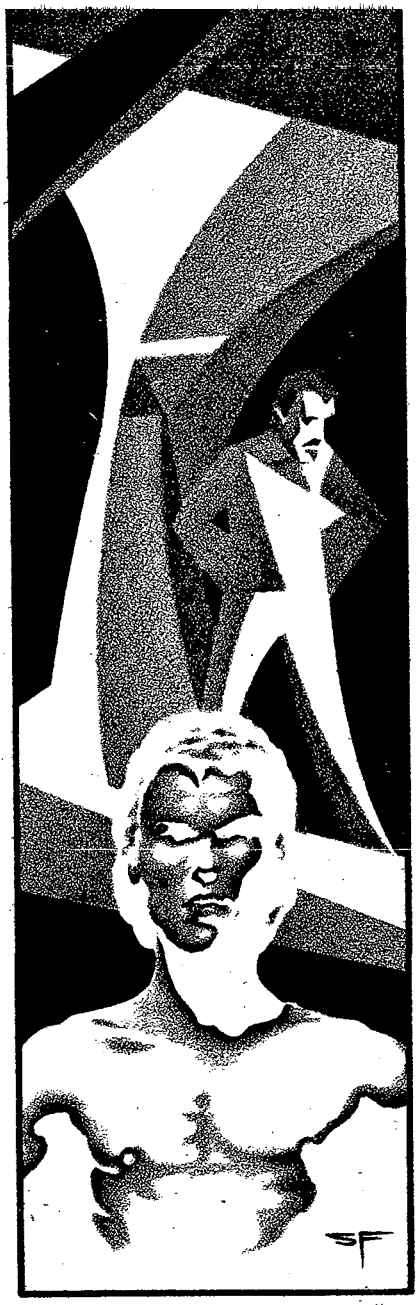
My question Mr. Baen is this. You are a modern power in science-fiction and can be assumed to deal with moral questions as well as the other kinds and what I want to know is this: would I have been better off returning the check to Galaxy Publishing Corporation and refusing first World Serial Rights or would it have been all the same, this annihilation of my brothers that is, and I at least thirty-six dollars ahead?

That is my basic question Mr. Baen and I would appreciate hearing from you. My other question, not so basic, not really important, just nagging me is this: whatever happened to K.M. O'Donnell?

Who *was* K.M. D'Donnell?

In equivocation and doubt,

WILLIAM COYNE★



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Dear Mr. Baen,

I don't know how the blend of *If* into *Galaxy* has affected the latter's circulation, but I find it a much more interesting magazine these days. With Jerry Pournelle's exploration of scientific frontiers, Dick Geis' unleashing of Alter on the universe, Master Robinson's occasional blast into deep center field, and your own rather exuberant management, you seem to have a winning team. My God! A magazine that dares to dream! It's beautiful, and I thank you.

Now that that's said, I have a few dumb questions about the Dean drive. I first learned about it from *Popular Science* and I was impressed, being just a kid—and an unusually naive one. I eagerly awaited an announcement by NASA that they were testing an amazing new space drive system that would open up the solar system to human probing. It soon became obvious that NASA had at least a little more talent to call on than *Popular Science*. If NASA wasn't using it, it was probably a fake. Later, I took a good look at the idea and saw why it couldn't possibly work. Recently, there's been some mention of the idea in various science fiction magazines as one of those nice dreams that just didn't work in the real world.

Okay, I'll accept all of that, even though there was a picture in *Popular Science* of Dave Garroway sliding a piece of paper under one of Dean's gadgets while it was hovering. Maybe someone hypnotized the camera or something. I'd like to know what really happened.

To go on—in 1967 I met a man who ran an Electronics Countermeasures (ECM) shop at a SAC base. Sgt. Wyman turned out to be an amateur inventor as well as a dedicated career man in the U.S.A.F.—and one of the few people I've ever met who had even heard of a Dean drive. Well, he suggested what he called an "improvement" on the thing. I'd call it "making the impossible possible". His idea was simple—make the counter-rotating weights of Dean's system flip over every half-rotation of the weights. Imagine the weights mounted in a frame. Every time they either face or oppose each other, turn the frame over 180 degrees. The weights will always swing in the same direction, and after eight years I still can't see why Wyman's machine shouldn't do everything Dean claimed *his* would.

Any comments?

Paul J. Martos

3400 W. US 20
Michigan City, Ind. 46360

Yes. Either you or Sgt. Wyman should construct a model incorporating the modification. If it works you may be sure the readers of Galaxy *will hear of it. (I, too, was once a teenager avidly awaiting The Announcement.)*

Dear Mr. Baen:

Since I've been reading *Galaxy*, I've noticed that you've urged readers on several occasions to send various articles to their respective Congressmen. I've also read several other articles, that likewise deserved to be sent to our fearless (& often brainless or is it gutless) leaders in Washington, DC.

I, myself, have intended to send these articles, but keep on forgetting to get them copied; I'd rather not tear up the magazine.

Now I'd bet that I'm not the only sluggard among your readers. Thus, I must try and rectify this situation. Belike you and Messrs.

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Bova & Ferman could collect these pithy, trenchant, articulate & intelligent articles from your several magazines (While your magazine is well worth reading, you, for better or worse, do not hold the corner on worthy articles.) and send them regularly to our benighted leaders. (This is not to say that there is not brain power in Washington. It just seems that it is all being used to perpetuate political careers and only occasionally to try and solve, in a short-sighted manner, various problems)

True this will cost some money. I can only help you here by buying your magazine. It is just possible that after a year of such stimulation, our leaders might be willing to pay a modest sum for the articles or actually subscribe to the magazine (thus getting the fiction as well) or both.

If such a scheme were put into operation, you could indicate to us, the readers, which articles were being sent and perhaps unleash a barrage of postcards. This being much less complicated then trying to get the article reproduced and sending them on.

Oh yes, may I suggest that you try and get Karel Thole to do a cover for you. He is excellent and should be nominated for a Hugo one of these days.

Yours sincerely,
Mr. jan howard finder
cc: Messrs. Bova & Ferman
PSC Box 614
APO NY 09293

The whole point of persuding readers to forward material to political persons is to demonstrate to the politicians the depth of concern on the part of members of their own constituencies. To do as you propose would simply convert Galaxy's *readership into just another pressure group.*

Dear Mr. Baen;

I was disturbed by Jerry Pournelle's "Step Farther Out" in the October *Galaxy*. While the report of Hawking's results and presentation was captivating, it bothers me that someone who I consider one of *the* best writers of rational science fiction should appear to be so willing to tolerate, perhaps even succumb to, irrationality. Hopefully he was only swayed temporarily by the magic of the moment.

The fact that naked singularities may exist, and can spew out energy as random crud, should be no more disturbing than the fact that particle accelerators exist, and that the energy going into them shows up as equally random stuff at the points of collision. Pournelle (and I assume Hawking) gave no evidence that the energy produced had any particular tendency to become Pournelles, Hawkings or other monsters. In fact, random, unconstrained, processes are the least interesting of all. It is natural and technological evolution, directed and constrained by selection criteria, that produces monsters and physicists. Expecting a creature to drop out of a churning singularity is no more reasonable than expecting a local entropy reversal to cause the same creature to condense out of the air. Both events are possible, but both are so improbable as to be absurd. Believing otherwise, on currently avaliable evidence, is blatant mysticism. I expect that from the hordes of soft-headed people we are currently plagued with, but I expected better from Jerry Pournelle. I hope he recovers soon.

By the way, I'm looking forward to "The Mote in God's Eye" addenda, since I consider the novel to be the best science fiction of at least the last few years. "Inferno" was pretty good too. Long live Niven/Pournelle.

I found your editorial agreeable, but there is probably a technical error in one of your examples which weakens your argument a little. There was a note in an issue of *Aviation Week and Space Technology* about four months ago (sorry, I don't have a reference) stating that Lockheed and Rockwell Industries had been issued competitive contracts by the Air Force to develop a passive orbital optical system for redirecting high energy bursts from ground based lasers. So you see, its not necessary to build power plants and fortresses in orbit to zap the ground with lasers. An orbiting mirror allows you to get the same effect much more cheaply.

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Happy Anniversary.

Sincerely,
Hans Moravec

Artificial Intelligence Laboratory
Computer Science Department
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

Well . . . maybe. But for use against major emplacements such mirrors would have to be quite large, and would thus be sitting (well, orbiting) ducks–unless they were heavily defended, that is. In which case rather than obviate the need, they would be *"space fortresses!" Here's Jerry:*

Dear Jim,

I am enormously flattered by Moravec's remarks, and of course I do try to write rational science fiction. E'en so, I fear I remain unrepentant: I reported what Hawking said, including his remark that 'we might have to wait a long time before the singularity emits one of us, but eventually it must.' Obviously that's a highly improbable event.

As to mysticism, I have mixed feelings: that is, it is fairly obvious to me that the universe contains phenomena we do not at present understand; there is a tendency among certain elements of Big Science to reject data which don't fit into our current paradigms; and thus one must, in my judgment, be ready to accept some of the data of mystics and occultists without necessarily accepting their explanations of same. Obviously Moravec and I are in agreement on that point.

Beyond that, though, there is another question: is the universe rational in all respects? Is "nature" the "whole show" as C S Lewis inquires in his charming essay on *Miracles* (MacMillan paperback, 1947, reprinted 1974)? I like to think of myself as rational, and certainly I believe the evidence supports the proposition that the universe is mostly rational; but as Lewis does, I can see some evidence for something beyond the purely mechanistic in human affairs. Comes now Hawking to say that the more deeply he probes the universe, the less orderly it becomes. Incidentally, he gave a very similar talk to a scientific meeting held at the Vatican last year.

What does this all mean for our everyday lives? I think only this: that rationalism, as a philosophy, has its limits, because it says little about ethics, and what it does say is not always palatable: atheistic humanism is the lonliest of positions, for one is constantly confronted with human beings who, on any purely rational consideration, are not only worthless, but a burden on mankind. One finds nearly unanswerable the cynical argument in the *Republic*: that one whould seem virtuous, in order to win the esteem of one's fellow men (for that is desirable), but it is silly to *be* honest, courageous, just, temperant, or prudent so long as one can escape the consequences of one's unpopular actions. To the extent that I, like most of us, find discrepancies between what I do, and what I think I *should* do—whether "should" be considered in religious terms, or as rationally calculated to maximize my material satisfactions—I plead guilty of irrational behavior, and thus, I suppose, mysticism.

I did, though, make it clear in my little report on Hawking that his lecture didn't really change my life. It would hardly be prudent to count on black holes emitting creatures. The event would be so improbable as to make most of us call it a miracle!

Incidentally, I should have thought that orbiting mirror systems would suffer from double attenuation of laser energy as it passed through the atmosphere. The advantages of having one's power plant on the ground may well overcome the attenuation losses, but a definitive answer to that requires more data than I have available. Of course what Jim was arguing for *was* ground-based lasers, which could be used to launch spacecraft when they weren't needed as defense systems; with any luck they'd never be needed for defense, while having them as launchers could just be the most important event since the discovery of the New World.

Again, thanks for the kind words.

Jerry Pournelle

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Sirrah Baen et al:

Kudos to Richard Geis' October column, for verily he hath spake wisdom.

If we need edification and a topic of self-service at cocktail parties, we would spend a few nights with *War and Peace, Doctor Zhivago,* or *The Gulag Archipelago*. It would scarcely be to our benefit to say, "I've read *Dhalgren,*" which would evoke no reaction so much as, "What the hell's that?"

The crux of the matter is in the PURPOSE for the various types of literature. There is a need for verbose, weighty tomes that categorize their readers as Deep Thinkers, and there is a far greater need for good, sound escapist/adventure reading that we don't need to flaunt to win the admiration of the Lesser Lights.

Science Fiction, Romance, Mystery, all are just such reading. Romance and Mystery writers, however, don't suffer under the delusion that they are bound by the Muses to create everlasting Classics. This affliction seems limited to SF authors, who, because of the unusual nature of their chosen field, find within themselves a drive to immortalize their work as a monument to science fiction which will elevate it to the status of respectability.

Why bother? Nobody reads that pretentious garbage. Stream-of-consciousness is bullshit, reserved for authors with an intellectual hard-on and editors who think it gives their magazine stature. The only people who aren't enamoured of it are the folks with the coins, who spend their shekels on stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end, stories with a plot, and characters that aren't denizens of an acid high. A little good, wholesome murder sells better than a dozen opuses of the Deep, Underlying Significance of life.

Authors, take note. Let's have some good, sound, well-penned "junk," and you'll rake in the rupees. If you try to impress the Mere Mortals with the all-engrossing scale of your profundity, your work will collect far more dust than distribution. I don't want to be enlightened, and if you think you're destined to be the Tolstoy of Science Fiction, forget my hard-earned bucks. You'll find an audience amongst the critics and the Higher Beings of the field, but they won't pay your rent. As the man says, write for the reader. We'd 'preshiate it.

Bob Renaud

Dear Mr. Baen,

Re Ray L. Stouff's letter in the January "Galaxy."

I am beginning to believe that you enjoy publishing letters like this one. It is obvious that Mr. Stouff, and others who share his views are wrong, and I do not like the idea that he will be blasted by numerous letters from your readership. Unless I am mistaken, this readership is well educated, intelligent (which isn't the same thing), open minded, and restriction-hating. By printing letters such as his you are, in effect, setting him up for ray-gun target practice by your readers.

Nevertheless. I do disagree with Mr. Stouff, and would like to say why I do.

The only obligation that a writer (sf, or otherwise) has to his readers is to create the finest work of art that he is capable of, at that stage of his literary life. He has no obligation to make his work easy to comprehend; although he must sufficiently communicate his thought to his audience. And most of all, he has no obligation to censor himself in order to make his readers comfortable. At times it is the artist's job to make his audience uncomfortable in order to get them to realize what he believes to be important facts. And one important fact is that sexuality is an important factor in the human experience, and must be properly integrated in this human experience and in human art.

Despite what Mr. Stouff wrote, science fiction and sex are not mutually exclusive. Science fiction must deal with sex. If it does not—for reasons such as those of Mr. Stouff—it will be putting boundaries around itself, and thus lose the ability to continue to boast of its exploration of unlimited ideas and situations. And more important: if science fiction ignores sex, it will be denying to some extent its claim to being an art form.

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Science fiction can be art. Sturgeon, Bradbury, Delany, Leiber, Disch et al. have proved this. SF doesn't need sex in each of its stories to be art, but it does need the freedom to include it.

Sincerely,
Louis V. Balbi

9 Claverton Court
Melville, New York 11746

Put down that ray gun!

Dear Mr. Baen,

In reference to the snapper of D.B. Wyatt's "Ambiguous Oracle" in your January issue, my immediate response to it is that it is comic. But comic unintentionally. As a simple-minded answer to a serious question, I can only think that the vaunted computer had a mentality on the level of the story's protagonist; or rather, that the computer's pithy response indicates the level of its programmer's mentality, if not the author's.

To say that the inherent fault of democratic (as against monarchic, or plutocratic, or other forms) of government can be summed up by 'GIGO', shows that the author is expressing an emotional, rather than a rational, response. Any form of government is limited, among other things, by the failings of its leaders. Therefore, I would expect that the 'Brain' would respond with the same answer to questions the same, but with 'monarchic', or 'plutocratic', etc., inserted for 'democratic'.

Perhaps Wyatt has never read the *Federalist Papers,* or *Leviathan,* or de Tocqueville's *Democracy In America*; or assumes that *Galaxy's* readers are unable to cope with more involved, and more difficult analyses of the problems of democracies, and in particular the problems of democracies as compared with different political forms.

In a time when it may seem that our form of government is failing us, when it may seem that we are not a federal democracy at all any more (for example, the contemporary variations on the rule by money, or conspiracy, theories, now so much in the air), stories which deal with the emotionally charged preoccupations of rational political animals, as we all are, are topical, and worthy of interest and thought. At the same time I ask that such stories show evidence of thought, and reasoned consideration, and shed light—let it be humor, or insight—on the world as it is, or feelings as they are felt; and possibly even maturity in a time of dread.

Sincerely,
Edward B. Harter

928½ W. Harrison St.
Elkart, Ind. 46514

I suspect Mr. Wyatt did not intend his story to be taken as a reasoned analysis of the inherent weakness of democracy, but rather as a dramatization of the emotional spasm of frustration and outrage we all feel from time to time when viewing the various idiocies being perpetrated by a government that, theoretically at least, is designed to work in the best interests of the governed. As for your contention that any government is limited by the failings of its leaders; the leaders are *the government. Surely in a democracy, if nowhere else, a people gets the government it deserves . . . (Citizens of Massachusetts excepted.)*

Dear Sir,

In keeping with the spirit of the "Galaxative", I would like to present the "Order of the Silver Scapel" to Mr. Robinson for his acumen in cutting Hax and Grandmasters alike to the quick. Previous recipients of the order should have been Damon Knight, James Blish, Alexie Pahshin, Joanna Russ, and Susan Wood. The actual award is quite functional, and can be used in reviewing next months' crop of paper. Use it in good health, Mr. Spider. Be careful not to cut your web.

Respectfully yours,
Bob Medcalf

Box 171
Baltimore, MD 21203

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